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## Becoming the prince's counsellor: Alexandre Kojève's Vichy-period manuscripts

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# Becoming the prince's counsellor: Alexandre Kojève's Vichy-period manuscripts

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## ABSTRACT

During the short lifespan of the Vichy regime, Alexandre Kojève produced a set of philosophical policy documents at the behest of Henri Moysset. In 2020, *The Notion of Work and Notice on the Political Neoformations of the Twentieth Century* were unearthed from the French National Archives, shedding new light on his intriguing correspondence with Moysset. The purpose of this article is to discuss the content of these manuscripts, which, at least in the mind of their author, combine political counsel with doing philosophy. Kojève's sudden transition from academic philosophy to civil service has long been a contentious subject and a puzzle to his biographers. *The Notion of Work* and *Neoformations* may help us establish Kojève as a thinker who remained true to his philosophical system and show the extent to which the political advice he produced was influenced by his philosophy.

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## Introduction

In his 1960–61 seminar on *Transference*, Jacques Lacan described Kojève as someone who now does other things than philosophy but still writes manuscripts of ‘a couple of hundred pages’ on Plato every now and then, which ‘circulate in various places’ (Lacan, 2017, p. 61). It might not have been entirely accurate of Lacan to suggest that in the course of his life, Kojève ever begun ‘doing something that has nothing to do with philosophy’ (ibid.); but it is certainly true to say that after the Second World War, Kojève's professional mainstay would be his role as a diplomat and political advisor in the service of the French Ministry of the Economy, which he joined in 1947. The first time he played a role akin to that of a political advisor, however, was already during the war, which started barely a handful of months after his six-year lecture course on Hegel came to an end.

Having been drafted into the French army at the outbreak of the war, Kojève abandoned his regiment during combat practice shortly after the German invasion in 1940 and returned to his home in the Paris suburbs before eventually leaving for southern France (Scholz, 2019, p. 23). In the Midi, he continued his philosophical work, albeit from then on with a considerably smaller circle of auditors and interlocutors. The two manuscripts from

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Kojève's Vichy-period that have been published so far, *The Notion of Authority* (2014) and *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right* (2000), were written for Henri Moysset (1875–1949), a particularly regular interlocutor of Kojève at the time.<sup>1</sup> To an extent, Moysset's position as a government official at Vichy already gives away the purpose of these manuscripts. Both *The Notion of Authority* and the *Outline* are works of political counsel. Written in Vichy France in 1942 and 1943, these manuscripts are practical guidelines on how to govern a state – 'notices' in all the senses of the French term<sup>2</sup> – just as much as they are philosophical texts.

The relatively few and far between studies of his life and work portray Moysset as a somewhat shadowy figure who preferred to keep to himself (cf. Cointet, 2017). He is perhaps best described as a Proudhon scholar who held teaching positions in military schools while also being an active politician associated with the social catholic movement in the Third Republic. The short vita printed in his candidate leaflet for the 1938 senatorial elections presents him as a former teacher at the *Ecole de la Guerre* and the *Centre des Hautes Etudes Navales*, a former government functionary at the national level, and as a member of the departmental council of Aveyron as well as acting major of the town of Gramond (Département de l'Aveyron, 1938, p. 1). Once given a post in the government of the Vichy state by his former student François Darlan in February 1941,<sup>3</sup> Moysset began commissioning studies from various intellectuals with view to establishing a philosophical foundation for the notions of work (*travail*), family (*famille*), and fatherland (*patrie*); the core elements, that is, of the so-called *Revolution nationale*, the ideology the Vichy state had given itself.

In 1992, the widow of Louis-Dominique Girard, another official at Vichy who worked with Moysset at the time, donated documents from Girard's estate to the *Archives nationales de France* (henceforth AN). This donation contained a considerable amount of documents that Moysset had left to Girard, including some of the studies on the core concepts of the so-called *Revolution nationale* commissioned by Moysset. Thanks to this donation, two further manuscripts that Kojève wrote in his Vichy-period are now accessible in the Fonds Henri Moysset of the AN. One of these two manuscripts is a short treatise titled *La notion du travail* (henceforth *The Notion of Work*),<sup>4</sup> written a few months before *The Notion of Authority*.<sup>5</sup> The other is a book-length text titled *Notice sur les néoformations politiques du XXème siècle* (henceforth *Notice on the Political Neoformations of the Twentieth Century*, or, *Neoformations*); a manuscript which bears no date, but whose content suggests that it was written after *The Notion of Authority*, perhaps in late 1942 or around the same time as the *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right* in 1943.

This article outlines and discusses the content of these two manuscripts in the Fonds Moysset of the AN. In so doing, I present new insights yielded by these manuscripts about the development of Kojève's thought during his Vichy-period. I begin my discussion with *The Notion of Work* before moving on to *Neoformations*. In closing this article, I speculate on the nature of the personal relationship between Kojève and Moysset, and situate the two manuscripts as an intellectual link between Kojève's pre- and post-war work.

## The Notion of Work

From his lectures on Hegel onwards, the notion of "work" would play a central role in Kojève's philosophy as the driving force of the dialectic of master and slave. 'History is the

History of the working slave' (Kojève, 1980, p. 20), as he remarks in his commented translation of section IV-A from *The Phenomenology of Spirit* on *Lordship and Bondage*. The overlap between the discussion of "work" in the *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* and the ideas presented in *The Notion of Work* is thus considerable. As far as its philosophical content is concerned, the manuscript both expands the discussion of work from the Hegel lectures at the same time as it vulgarises these ideas and restates them in somewhat more plain and straightforward language for a political functionary, with a view to political application in the present situation.

There are two typewritten versions of *The Notion of Work* in the Fonds Moysset at the AN. The first of them is 51 pages long, and the second version is 62 pages. Kojève wrote up the first version of the manuscript in January 1942 in the village of Vars on the Franco-Italian border and finished proofreading it one month later in Artix, a town in what is nowadays the Pyrénées-Atlantiques department, more or less at the other end of what used to be the so-called *Zone libre* at the time.

In contrast to the first version of the manuscript, the second is only sparsely annotated and has not been signed off with date and place. However, despite the significantly smaller number of annotations, the second manuscript is still a working version: a slip of paper stapled to the cover sheet indicates that three pages are still to be revised. It is not clear who attached this slip of paper to the cover page. The pages indicated for revision contain abrupt leaps in the text, incoherent sentences, and incomplete paragraphs,<sup>6</sup> which could have been spotted either by Moysset or by Kojève. It is also unclear whether the sporadic annotations in this version are Moysset's or Kojève's.

Both versions of *The Notion of Work* have the same structure and the same content. The circumstance that the second manuscript is 11 pages longer than the first one is primarily due to the use of larger spacing between paragraphs and sections of text. Lack of a sign-off, the instructions for further corrections stapled to the cover page, and the apparent readiness to use more paper to improve readability of the text raise the question of whether the second version of the manuscript has been prepared by Moysset's secretary on the basis of Kojève's handwritten corrections to the first version.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of structure, *The Notion of Work* is moreover fully identical to *The Notion of Authority*, which would come to be completed a few months later, in May 1942. *The Notion of Work* consists of a short Introduction followed by two main sections: one is listed in the table of contents as 'Analyses', the other as 'Deductions'. Both main sections are divided into three parts each. The analytic part features a phenomenological, a metaphysical, and an ontological analysis of the notion of work, while the deductive part of the manuscript establishes the political, ethical, and psychological conclusions to be drawn from the preceding analyses of the notion of work in the abstract.

The Introduction of *The Notion of Work* rearticulates basic ideas from the Hegel lectures, with Kojève drawing up a distinction between specifically human work and work done by animals and clarifying that the former must be understood starting from the master-slave dialectic. Kojève also takes great care to convey to his reader that the notion of "risk" is the antithesis of the notion of "work". Going over the very core of his interpretation of Hegel<sup>8</sup> once more for Moysset, Kojève emphasises that specifically human work is the eventual outcome of the specifically human desire for the desire of another, which leads on to the desire for recognition, and thence to the dialectic of master and slave. The master, being whoever prevailed in the struggle for recognition, will

henceforth be identified with the risk they took when entering this struggle. The slave, however, will be defined by the work they do for the master. For the slave, work is a means of restoring part of the humanity they have lost when losing the struggle for recognition. The slave is 'more animal than human' and so their existence depends on the humanising activity of work, whereas the master is already 'more human than animal' (*NoW*, p. 2)<sup>9</sup> by virtue of having gained the upper hand in the struggle for recognition. This rudimentary restatement of the master-slave dialectic for Moysset ends on a gesture towards the later *Notion of Authority*: Kojève remarks that the 'complex' leading from the desire for desire via the struggle for recognition to the establishment of the positions of master and slave is also the 'complex' that lies 'at the origin of all (?) [sic!] authority' (*ibid.*).

The three analytical segments of *The Notion of Work* continue to reuse ideas already articulated in the Hegel lectures. This extensive and overt recycling of previously articulated ideas makes *The Notion of Work* an interesting manuscript in Kojève's œuvre, inasmuch as it demonstrates the immense difficulty of separating his work as a political advisor from his work as a philosopher. Each segment of the analytic part of the manuscript puts forward one core thesis: that human work is an essentially 'counternatural' (*ibid.*, p. 7) activity; that human work entails the transformation of error into truth; and the thesis of the identity of human work and historical time.

The circumstance that the manuscript starts with the phenomenological analysis of work suggests that *The Notion of Work* puts the same methodology into practice as *The Notion of Authority* and the *Outline*. In the latter text, Kojève explains with reference to Plato, Weber, and Husserl that this method consists in isolating a particularly pure case of the phenomenon in question in order to arrive at a preliminary definition, and then moving on from there to its metaphysical and ontological 'substrate' so as to ensure that the definition provided will also apply to future instances of the phenomenon (Kojève, 2000, p.30, cf. also, pp. 29; Kojève, 2014, pp. 2–4).

The phenomenological analysis defines work *in general* as any transformation of nature which nature itself could not have brought about on its own (*NoW*, p. 4). Specifically human work differs from animal activity which transforms nature in that the latter is always carried out in accordance with the instinct of the acting animal, whereas human activity can only be called work if it runs counter to instinct and transforms the 'nature' of the human being at the same time as it transforms nature itself. Human work, Kojève suggests, involves the 'repression' of instinct (*ibid.*, p. 26). Kojève's go-to examples – mentioned throughout the entirety of the manuscript – of this counternatural aspect of human work is the work that led to the creation of the first airplane and the first submarine, which allow humans to live, respectively, like birds or fish. Any being who carries out work thus defined is a human being, and since work is at least 'to a certain extent independent of the conditions in which it is carried out' (*ibid.*, p. 7) (work does 'not entirely' depend on 'what the worker is at any given moment in time', Kojève explains) (*ibid.*, p. 8), it is an activity that liberates the human being from nature. Only by risking one's life in the struggle for recognition or by working is the human being capable of attaining freedom from the natural given.

The metaphysical analysis centres on the relationship between work and the categories of error and truth.<sup>10</sup> Building on his previous considerations on the 'counternatural' character of human work, Kojève proposes that a peculiarity of the human being is that through their work, the human being may not only introduce realities into the natural

world that are opposed to it but also maintain this error in nature. In so doing, the human being creates a new reality in which what has formerly been erroneous is rendered true retroactively (ibid., p. 10). Work can thus be defined as the activity of transforming error into truth. The metaphysical analysis of work concludes on two connected claims. The first is that by engaging in work, human beings create a two-tiered real world, divided into the sphere of nature and the sphere of culture (ibid., pp. 11–12). The second is that human work also gives rise to the universe of discourse; with discourse (regardless of whether it is scientific, artistic, philosophical, etc.) being what allows us to reveal the essence of reality without being part of this reality itself (ibid., pp. 12–13). Striking a distinctly Platonic note, Kojève insists therefore not only that work creates a *real world* characterised by the nature-culture dichotomy, but maintains that this world in itself forms merely one tier of a two-tiered *universe* insofar as work is furthermore creative of a realm of discourse, or, ideas, situated *above* the natural and cultural world (ibid., p. 13).

As in *The Notion of Authority*,<sup>11</sup> the ontological analysis of work is the shortest of the three analytical parts of *The Notion of Work*. Here, Kojève's focus is on the relation of human work to the ontological dimension of time. As Kojève has it, work is the activity that reveals to the human the 'interconnection of being and nothingness' (ibid., p. 15).<sup>12</sup> Human work brings nothingness into being just as it turns being into nothingness: the realisation of a project is simultaneously the transformation into reality of something that did not yet exist and the rendering non-existent of a previously extant reality (ibid.). At the end of the brief ontological analysis, we already begin to see a first glimpse of the political character of *The Notion of Work*, which becomes far more explicit in the deductive part. Kojève insists there that because as humans, we are nothingness inserted into being, we must work if we wish to continue to exist *as human beings*. In a subtly Kantian manner, Kojève concludes from this that work is therefore both right and duty of human being (ibid., p. 17).

In the deductive part of the manuscript, Kojève's main theses are that the function of work exceeds that of the mere sustenance of life; that it is not contradictory to demand the right to work *and* the right to leisure; and that human work is essentially social in its character.

In the section on the psychological consequences of the preceding analysis of the notion of work, Kojève insists that a human being who is only working to sustain their biological existence cannot be considered working *strictu sensu* (nor, in fact, can they be considered fully human) because their activity is entirely in correspondence with their instincts (*NoW*, pp. 19–20). Human work in the true sense of the term must be capable both of sustaining the animal life of the worker and of producing superfluity; human work must produce more than what the worker can consume as animal (ibid., p. 20).

The discussion of the 'psychological consequences' contains a lengthy segment on the division of labour (ibid., pp. 22–36),<sup>13</sup> followed by a segment on machinery (ibid., pp. 36–40). In these segments, Kojève suggests that there were two significant technical innovations in the history of human work with an 'egalitarian' function:<sup>14</sup> money and the industrial machine. Money equalises consumption but leads to a differentiation of production and hence creates real differences between professions (ibid., pp. 23–24, cf. also p. 38). Industrial machinery, however, equalises production and thus reduces differences between professions (ibid., pp. 38–39). By enabling the worker to consume the products of their labour, the



machine renders the work of the worker less servile and allows the worker to live the life of a master, that is, of a consumer, too (*ibid.*, p. 38). This circumstance is presented as carrying considerable historical significance: the machine, in Kojève's view, abolishes the 'well-defined and irreducible distinction' (*ibid.*) between master and slave.

In Kojève's discussion of the division of labour and of machinic production, an interesting political dilemma becomes apparent: on the one hand, Kojève makes a noticeable effort to help Moysset achieve his goal of establishing a corporatist state (potentially inspired to some degree by Salazar's Portugal)<sup>15</sup> in Vichy France. On the other hand, he makes it clear to Moysset that such corporatist aspirations to some extent run counter to a potential inherent in the present world: machinic production, Kojève emphasises, will inevitably imbue workers with the communist ideal because machinic production has, in fact, created a 'real basis' (*ibid.*, p. 39) for the abolition of social classes. The crucial question, Kojève consoles Moysset, is whether the 'maximum' degree of mechanisation necessary for the establishment of a classless society is achievable in reality (*ibid.*, pp. 39–40).

The section on the moral consequences of the philosophical analysis of work returns to the thesis – first mentioned in the ontological analysis and developed further in the part on psychology – that work is simultaneously a right and duty of the human being. Apart from explaining to Moysset why the demand for a right to work is morally justified (*ibid.*, pp. 40–44), Kojève also argues in this section that it is not a contradiction to demand a right to leisure while demanding a right to work at the same time (*ibid.*, pp. 44–47). If a key characteristic of human work is that it gives rise to superfluity, then those who carry out such work will need leisure time in order to consume the superfluity they produce (*ibid.*, pp. 44–45). Kojève therefore advises Moysset that the state should increase the productivity of work and reduce its duration through mechanisation (*ibid.*, p. 45). The more the productivity of work increases, the more 'humanised,' or, in other words, the further removed from nature the products we produce will be, but in order to consume these products, we need a 'cultural' life in addition to the lives of work and of rest (*ibid.*, pp. 46–47).

The section on the political consequences of the analysis of the concept of work opens on the assertion that it is not possible to found a state exclusively on the principle of work. Any attempt at doing so, Kojève tells Moysset, neglects 'risk' as another anthropogenic principle, and it overlooks that every state at least implicitly presupposes the specifically political element of authority (*ibid.*, pp. 50–53). The conclusion Kojève eventually draws from this line of thought is that in order for the human being to fulfil their historical task of 'transforming the world in which they live' from a 'natural' into a 'cultural' world (*ibid.*, p. 53), they need a project. The word 'project' in its literal meaning, he tells Moysset, already suggests an idea that goes beyond the given world (*ibid.*, p. 54). Since humans, as individuals, tend to accept the world as it is given to them and hence cease to do work, it is justifiable for society to impose a project on the individual (*ibid.*). Likewise, any human community that wants to remain a human community rather than relapse into animality must entrust the state with the task of providing work in the form of a project (*ibid.*, pp. 55–56). Kojève concludes from these considerations that the state must necessarily direct the economy (*ibid.*, p. 56).



## Notice on the Political Neoformations of the Twentieth Century

In a letter from 30 November 1942, Moysset proposes to Kojève that in case he has trouble obtaining a typewriter, he could simply send him a handwritten copy of some manuscript. His secretary, Moysset mentions in this letter, would be more than happy to type up the text, so that Kojève can then revise it when he comes to Vichy. There is no clear indication in Moysset's letters that Kojève indeed visited the former in Vichy any time soon.<sup>16</sup> However, in a subsequent letter, dated 7 December 1942, Moysset acknowledges receipt of the manuscript by post. Moysset reveals in this second letter that he read this manuscript with great interest, and he informs Kojève that his secretary will now begin to type up a double copy. There is a good reason to ask ourselves whether the manuscript in question here might be the *Notice on the Political Neoformations of the Twentieth Century*.

The copy of *Neoformations* preserved in the Fonds Moysset is a typewritten manuscript of 344 pages. The manuscript offers no precise information as to when it was written. Just as the second version of *The Notion of Work* in the Fonds Moysset, *Neoformations* is not signed off with a date and place. It is clear, however, that *Neoformations* was written after *The Notion of Authority*.<sup>17</sup> The Introduction to *Neoformations* indirectly refers to *The Notion of Authority* as 'the previous notice' (*Neo*, p. 12)<sup>18</sup> and mentions that the four different types of authority outlined there shall find application in the analysis of the political 'neoformations' of the twentieth century as carried out in this manuscript.

Kojève defines his object of study in *Notice on the Political Neoformations of the Twentieth Century* as states that emerged after the First World War and put new political principles into practice. This definition aims to exclude all those states that gained independence after 1918 but imitate the already extant liberal-democratic organisational blueprint (*Neo*, p. 1). The three neoformations identified by Kojève are the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and Fascist Italy. A basic premise of *Neoformations* is that while each of these three states put 'new' principles into practice, they are nevertheless singular entities which cannot be reduced to one another in the final analysis (*ibid.*, p. 3). While states such as Portugal under Salazar, Francoist Spain, and Metaxist Greece are also considered to embody 'new' political principles, Kojève maintains that these states are derivatives of the original three neoformations (*ibid.*, pp. 2–3).

After an Introduction of 14 pages, *Neoformations* is divided up into three main parts. The first of these outlines four basic politico-theoretical concepts that inform Kojève's study, namely those of the 'authoritarian' state, the 'dictatorial' state, the 'ideological' and the 'totalitarian' state. The second main part of the manuscript offers studies of each of the three neoformations identified by Kojève. Each study is subdivided into an examination of the 'genesis', the 'current state' and a commentary on the 'war and future prospects' of the respective state under analysis. The third main part contains a comparison of the three neoformations. Here, Kojève highlights the authoritarian character of all three states as a common feature that distinguishes them from democratic ones, and then sets out the essential differences between communism and fascism in general, and Italian fascism and German national socialism in particular. This is followed by a brief, eight-page Conclusion in which Kojève makes recommendations for the future of the French state which prefigure those of the later 'Latin Empire' manuscript (cf. Kojève, 2004).

The section on the 'authoritarian' state in the first main part of *Neoformations* engages in a thorough manner with the central postulate of Carl Schmitt's<sup>19</sup> decisionistic political theory, namely that the distinction between friend and enemy is constitutive of the domain of the political as such (*Neo*, pp. 15–37). The copy of Maurice Davie's *La guerre dans les sociétés primitives* from Kojève's library<sup>20</sup> suggests that the discussion of the 'authoritarian state' in *Neoformations* combines Schmitt's political theory with Davie's historico-anthropological reflections on the existential struggle between 'primitive hordes' as generative of statehood (cf. Davie, 1931, pp. 244–266, or, respectively, 1968, pp. 160–175) to explain the emergence of the state as the bearer of authority in the political domain. Kojève's commentary on the emergence of the state as a group of friends opposing a common enemy (*Neo*, p. 30) – with the political relations between the in-group being of 'authoritarian' rather than violent character (ibid., pp. 36–39) – leads him to conclude that it is a sign of developmental maturity if a state has achieved self-consciousness of its function as a bearer of authority in the political domain (ibid., 53–54). The argument put forward here is in fact that the authoritarian state constitutes the completion of the historical development of the state in general (ibid., p. 55–56). To illustrate this point, Kojève uses a psychological analogy. He remarks that the life of an infant is sexual in character regardless of the circumstance that this sexual aspect is oblivious to the infant, whereas the mature human being is aware of the sexual motivations of their actions (ibid., p. 54).<sup>21</sup> All three neoformations under considerations, Kojève contends, are consciously authoritarian (ibid., p. 53) and have hence reached political maturity.

All three neoformations, the manuscript explains further, are also dictatorial, totalitarian, and ideological states. They are dictatorial as every newly formed state tends to require a leader as personal support for the exercise of political authority (ibid., pp. 44–45, p. 63), but personal dictatorship might in Kojève's opinion be a temporary characteristic of the three neoformations (ibid., p. 64). All three neoformations are totalitarian because they seek to *intensify* their political authority as far as possible (ibid., pp. 92–93). That is, they seek to convert all individuals within their territory into citizens who engage in political acts out of recognition of the political authority of the state 'and not merely out of fear of violence' (*Neo*, p. 124). They are moreover ideological states as they seek to *extend* their political authority to as many domains of life as possible (ibid., p. 96, pp. 98–101). The Soviet Union is presented as both the most totalitarian and the most ideological of these three neoformations: it is the most totalitarian because by denying the existence of classes, the Soviet Union supposedly extends its political authority to all inhabitants of its territory (ibid., pp. 180–182), and most ideological because it denies the religious sphere any legitimacy (ibid., p. 180).

The second main part of *Neoformations* examines the Soviet Union, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany in chronological order of their emergence as states. In the Introduction, Kojève explains that the states under discussion ought to be covered in this order as it is impossible to understand their political essence unless one treats them as results of a chain of historically determined events (ibid., p. 7). The analysis of the Soviet Union (50 pp. in total) is slightly longer than that of Fascist Italy (31 pp.) and that of Nazi Germany (27 pp.). The reason for the slightly greater length of the analysis of the Soviet Union is hinted at in the Introduction, where Kojève states that the political form that the Soviet Union gave itself has been a model for the other two states (ibid., p. 9).

The central claim of the analyses of the three neoformations in the second part is that their genesis has gone hand in hand with a change of the type of political authority emanated by each of the three states. The Soviet Union, as stabilised under Stalin's leadership, changed what was initially a FJML<sup>22</sup> distribution of authority under Nicholas II (ibid., p. 193) into an overall configuration of JM(LF) (ibid., p. 215); the Italian fascists changed the FL(M) configuration of the Italian Kingdom (ibid., p. 240) into LFM(J) (ibid., p. 258); and the Nazi state transformed the perennially weak JF authority of the Weimar state (ibid. pp. 277–278) into an LMF(J) configuration (ibid., p. 284), thus almost a continuation of the political authority of pre-World War One German Empire, whose overall configuration was MLF(J) (ibid.). Kojève tells Moysset that every change in the type of authority, as opposed to a mere change of its 'support', constitutes a revolution in a broad sense of the term (ibid., pp. 190–191). Yet he also emphasises that only the Soviet Union has emerged from a revolution in the strict and narrow sense of the term (ibid., p. 188), that is, from an accomplishment of a clean break with the past (ibid., p. 190). In the passages on the future outlook provided at the end of each of the three analyses, Kojève expresses strong doubt that either Nazi Germany or Italy will win the Second World War (ibid., pp. 266–267, pp. 293–294). The Soviet Union, he tells his reader, is the only of the three neoformations likely to survive the end of the conflict (ibid., p. 230, pp. 234–237).

The comparative section of *Neoformations* opens on the claim that the popularity of the slogan 'neither communism nor fascism' suggests that the three neoformations have common elements which set them apart from democratically organised states (ibid., p. 298). The comparisons that follow combine an apology for the political form of the three neoformations with a denunciation of liberal democracy. Kojève insists that while one cannot deny that all three neoformations are personal dictatorships, one also needs to admit this form of leadership is freely chosen (ibid., p. 299).<sup>23</sup> Democratic regimes are presented by Kojève as nothing more than veiled class dictatorships (ibid.), which, if not through open violence, maintain themselves through economic power differentials rather than 'freely recognised authority in full knowledge of the cause' (ibid., p. 300). As for the differences between communism and fascism, the main difference lies in the attitude of the state vis-à-vis the peasantry (ibid., pp. 324–325). A fascist state will regard the peasant class as indispensable for the maintenance of its political power (ibid., p. 325), while a communist state will seek to eliminate the peasantry as a class (ibid., pp. 325–326).<sup>24</sup> That aside, Kojève's reader learns that only communism is internationalist (ibid., p. 329), and so there can be several fascist states while communism will tend towards the universal and homogenous state (ibid.). The difference between the Nazi state and Fascist Italy, one reads in the manuscript, is that the former is a people's state and the latter a nation state (ibid., pp. 331–332). Nationhood is understood by the Nazis in ethnobiological terms (ibid.), whereas the Italian fascists understand the nation from a technological standpoint (ibid., p. 332).<sup>25</sup>

The Conclusion of *Neoformations* contains advice for Moysset on questions of organisation of a post-World War Two French state. In a manner strongly reminiscent of the 'Latin Empire' manuscript that Kojève wrote at the behest of de Gaulle's civil servants in 1945, he explains to Moysset that the future of the French state would lie in a 'bloc' of Latin states (ibid., pp. 343–344).

## Conclusion

The above exposé and discussion of *The Notion of Work* and *Neoformations* should already allow us to draw a number of conclusions regarding their significance for the study of Kojève's life and work. Perhaps the most immediate conclusion to be drawn from the above is that the Kojève-Moysset correspondence deserves closer examination.<sup>26</sup> The letters from Moysset deposited in the Fonds Kojève at the BnF acknowledge the receipt of at least five different texts.<sup>27</sup> As shown above, we can now engage in informed speculation as to which of these texts could be *The Notion of Work* and *Neoformations*, even though some uncertainty remains, particularly with regard to the latter manuscript. Apart from the number of texts whose receipt is acknowledged by Moysset, we need to acknowledge more generally that Kojève would seem to have engaged in a very vivid and amicable intellectual exchange with Moysset. The letters from Moysset to Kojève suggest that the two have frequently met for conversation, which presumably has had an influence on all the philosophical policy documents Kojève authored during the Second World War. Maybe Kojève would not have remained philosophically active had he not found such an interested interlocutor in Moysset.

Given Moysset's importance for Kojève's ongoing philosophical activity during the war, we may ask ourselves further why Kojève seemingly sought contact with Moysset towards the end of 1941. Kojève's manuscripts for Moysset undoubtedly offer advice on how to establish and govern the Vichy state, but the manuscripts also give us plenty of reasons to doubt that Kojève had a personal interest in a well-functioning Vichy state. His lack of a personal investment in the ideology or in the planned constitution of the Vichy state is underscored, for instance, by his remark from *The Notion of Work* that the creation of a real basis for the idea of communism through the mechanisation of work will pose difficulties when it comes to putting the planned corporatist constitution of Vichy into practice. Kojève's attempt in *Neoformations* to encourage Moysset to think about the role of a new, post-War French state in the world – because Italy and Nazi Germany will lose the war while the Soviet Union will emerge victorious – serves as a further sign of disinterest in Vichy. Regardless of the friendship that seemingly has developed between the two, we should thus have reason to assume that Kojève initially contacted Moysset for instrumental reasons, that is, as guarantor of material safety in the turmoil of the war.<sup>28</sup>

Biographical questions aside, the manuscripts allow us furthermore to establish continuities and ruptures in Kojève's thought before and after the Second World War. By way of a minor observation, it can be said that Kojève's 1950s attitude towards Carl Schmitt, which consisted in portraying him as a Marxist against his will,<sup>29</sup> already took shape in *Neoformations*, where Kojève describes Schmitt as an involuntary Hegelian (*Neo*, p. 15). As to more substantial observations, apart from the circumstance that *The Notion of Work* repeats and expands upon ideas from Kojève's lectures on Hegel, we can also say that one of the central ideas of *Neoformations* – namely that the authoritarian state is an eminently modern phenomenon, the highest stage of the historical development of the state – is not exactly a novelty in Kojève's thinking either. In his 1936–1937 seminar on Pierre Bayle, Kojève emphasised that Bayle's thought developed under the auspices of an authoritarian but secular state, or, in other words, a state which tolerated the expression of personal opinions rather than seek to impose opinions by means of violence.<sup>30</sup> In a subsequent draft for an essay on Pierre Bayle and Bernard de Fontenelle also dating from 1937, Kojève

outlines the material basis of Bayle's and Fontenelle's 'ideological attitude.' There he contends that whereas the 'closed economic systems' of feudalism do not require the 'authoritarian politics' of a central state, the 'practice of exchange interactions' and 'dependence on the market situation' characteristic of the market economy *does* require a 'central authoritarian power' to ensure internal and external peace.<sup>31</sup>

The idea that authoritarianism is the vanishing point of political modernity in fact turns up again in Kojève's post-World War Two diplomatic work. In the draft version of an article written at Jean Filippi's request in late August 1949 and published in late September in the magazine *France-Illustration*, Kojève holds that the liberal international order of the post-war period as shaped by the United States 'necessarily' had to assume an authoritarian character.<sup>32</sup> This authoritarianism is embodied by the Bretton Woods institutions. Liberalism, one reads in the article draft, will not establish itself on its own: the establishment of liberalism requires a framework of international organisations in and through which sovereign states agree on a liberal economic policy, and it requires that these policies be applied under the permanent supervision of these very same international organisations. We now also know that Kojève's analysis from *Neoformations* of the peasantry as a class that is indispensable for nationalist politics is echoed in the advisory work on the agricultural policy of the EEC he would later carry out for the French government. In a note from January 1961 to his then-superior Bernard Clappier on *La C.E.E. et le problème agricole*, Kojève portrays the gradual abolition of the peasantry as the greatest challenge of the second half of the twentieth century and gives Clappier advice on how to facilitate this abolition by means of supranational policy.<sup>33</sup>

It can therefore presumably be said already that the manuscripts from the Fonds Moysset constitute a link between Kojève's work as an academic philosopher in the pre-war period and the work he authored in his function as a diplomat after the Second World War. The overlap between the ideas presented in *The Notion of Work* and *Neoformations* and ideas articulated both before and after draws a picture of Kojève as a fairly persistent thinker; a thinker who, in private, would undoubtedly adapt his ideas to the express or anticipated needs of his interlocutors, but always remained true to his philosophical system.

## Notes

1. The *Outline* might not have been directly commissioned by Moysset, but Moysset's letters to Kojève suggest that the manuscript was nonetheless addressed to him. Of particular relevance in this context is the letter to Kojève dated 14 May 1943, where Moysset writes in postscript that he would find a 'philosophical analysis of the notion of right' interesting, and an undated letter in which Moysset expresses his delight at Kojève finishing his work on the 'phenomenology of right' and declares that he will read it with great interest and pleasure. The Fonds Alexandre Kojève at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (henceforth BnF) holds 18 letters and one postcard written by or on behalf of Moysset between January 1942 and January 1944. The reference for all letters from Moysset to Kojève mentioned and cited in this article is (BnF, NAF 28320, box 22–2, envelope 11).
2. In French, *notice* may refer to a short study, an instruction or a piece of advice, and an advance warning.
3. Darlan was an admiral in the French Navy and head of government of the Vichy state between February 1941 and April 1942. The letters from Moysset in the Fonds Kojève suggest

that Kojève initiated contact with Moysset in late 1941, but it is not clear how he came to know Moysset in the first place. Danilo Scholz's suggestion that 'correspondence' between Moysset and Raymond Aron would reveal Moysset as an auditor of Kojève's lectures on Hegel sadly seems to be incorrect (cf. Scholz, 2019, p. 26 n. 9). There is only one letter by Moysset to Aron in the Fonds Aron at the BnF (in box 209, as indicated by Scholz), which concerns Aron's 1939 lecture before the Société française de philosophie titled *Democratic States and Totalitarian States*. It seems worth asking whether François Darlan might have introduced Kojève to Moysset. Kojève evoked a 'counter-admiral of the fleet' as one of the auditors of his lectures (Kojève, 1968, p. 19). This description roughly fits Darlan, who, by 1939, had been made an 'admiral of the fleet', a rank created exclusively for him.

4. Both *The Notion of Work* and *Neoformations* are written in French. All translations from these manuscripts are my own. I have also translated into English all of the marginal notes Kojève made in the books he owned, as well as my citations from Henri Moysset's documents on the Vichy constitution.
5. *The Notion of Authority* cross-references *The Notion of Work*. See (Kojève, 2014, p. 106).
6. On page 62, the last page of the second manuscript, the only annotation is a question mark underneath the final paragraph of the text. It could be that this question mark simply expresses a general dissatisfaction with the conclusion.
7. Moysset offered Kojève to have his secretary write up handwritten text by him in his letter from 30 November 1942. Moysset's subsequent letter from 7 December 1942 suggests that Kojève took the offer up. The manuscript in question here could be that of *Neoformations*.
8. See here, again, Kojève's annotated translation of the section of Hegel's *Phenomenology* on *Lordship and Bondage* at (Kojève, 1980, pp. 3–30).
9. AN 72AJ/3256, *La notion du travail*, 62-page manuscript. In-text references to this manuscript are abbreviated as *NoW*.
10. With error and truth being categories that allow us to grasp 'the fundamental structure of the objectively real World' (Kojève, 2014, p. 3), as Kojève puts it in *The Notion of Authority*. In the latter text, the phenomenon of authority is refracted through the lens of the metaphysical categories of time and eternity. It is worth calling to mind furthermore that the dialectic of error and truth is already a recurring theme in Kojève's Hegel lectures. Kojève's tripartite schema of phenomenology, metaphysics, and ontology as distinct-yet-related levels of philosophical analysis is already apparent in the discussion of error and truth we encounter there (cf. Kojève, 1980, p. 156).
11. In *The Notion of Authority*, Kojève does not even attempt the ontological analysis, mentioning that doing so would be too complex in relation to the task at hand (cf. Kojève, 2014, pp. 56–58).
12. And 'time' is but another name for this 'interconnection' of being and nothingness, as Kojève is quick to clarify (*NoW*, pp. 15–16).
13. It does not seem unlikely that in his discussion of the division of labour, which engages with the distinction between rural and urban work (*NoW*, p. 25) as well as between physical and mental work (ibid., p. 32), Kojève is attempting to answer questions posed by Moysset regarding the constitution of the Vichy state. In a note dated 17 January 1941 titled *Observations sur un projet de loi relative à la constitution d'un « Grand Conseil Consultatif »*, Moysset raises the question as to where exactly the line between intellectual and manual labour is to be drawn (AN 72AJ/3255, *Observations sur un projet de loi ...*, handwritten version, p. 8).
14. On the topic of money having an egalitarian function, see also the discussion of the 'Justice of equivalence' in 'bourgeois Droit' in the *Outline* (Kojève, 2000, pp. 445–448):.
15. What led me to this suspicion is an undated note titled *Message de Monsieur Joseph Barthelemy, Garde des Sceaux, à la Nation du Portugal*, in Moysset's documents on the Vichy constitution. The note extols Portugal as a 'rare and noble example of a people who has pulled itself back up before hitting the bottom of the abyss' (AN 72AJ/3255, *Message de Monsieur Joseph Barthelemy ...*, p. 1) and concludes by stating that in the Vichy constitution, one 'recognises the essence of the Salazarian doctrine' (ibid., p. 4).



16. A letter from 15 December 1942 suggests that Kojève had not yet been to Vichy by then. Only the next letter from Moysset preserved in the Fonds Kojève, dated 16 April 1943, implies that Kojève had recently visited him.
17. Scholz's summary (2019, p. 29) of Moysset's address to the École des cadres du Mayet-de-Montagne from 20 October 1941 on *Les conditions d'une renaissance française* suggests that this address also prefigures some of the ideas Kojève articulates in *Neoformations*. Moysset's address slightly predates the first letter preserved in the Fonds Kojève at the BnF. It could be that some of the themes under discussion in *Neoformations* developed out of conversations Kojève had with Moysset.
18. AN 72AJ/3256, *Notice sur les néoformations politiques du XXème siècle*. In-text references to this manuscript are abbreviated as *Neo*.
19. Whose name is misspelled as 'Karl Schmidt' in the manuscript.
20. This is the French version of Davie's *The Evolution of War*, first published in 1929. Kojève worked with Maurice Gerin's French translation, published by Payot in 1931. Kojève's copy of the book is heavily annotated. The date Kojève put on the last page before the appendices is '15/VI 43', indicating that his reading of Davie's book coincides at least approximately with the presumed period of writing of *Neoformations*. A clear indication of Kojève reading Schmitt into Davie is to be found in the remark 'the State is thus a function of the friend-enemy relation' on page 247 of his copy, which serves as a comment on a passage of Davie's text that reads '[t]his preliminary survey of the regulative system of primitive society should furnish a basis for an understanding of the influence of war on governmental organization' (Davie, 1968, p. 162). Davie's book also seems to have been an important reference for Kojève's thinking on the four types of authority from *The Notion of Authority: Appendix K on The Regulative System of Primitive Society*, is headlined 'political authority' by Kojève, and his annotations effectively map the four fundamental types of authority from *The Notion of Authority* onto Davie's discussion.
21. This analogy could be taken as a simplified restatement of the observations made by Sigmund Freud in his discussion of infantile sexuality in the fourth of his five lectures on psychoanalysis given at Clark University, Massachusetts, in 1909 (cf. Freud, 1924, pp. 44–45, or, respectively, 1990, pp. 43–44). Kojève's library contains a copy of the 1924 German publication of these lectures by Franz Deuticke. The fourth and fifth lectures, both of which discuss infantile sexuality, show persistent signs of Kojève's reading. This is the only copy of Freud's books in Kojève's library of which we know that it has been read prior to the Second World War: on the final page of the book, Kojève wrote the dates '7/V 27' and '27/VIII 50'. There is thus some uncertainty as to when exactly Kojève made his annotations. However, Kojève's annotations repeatedly draw out supposed similarities between Hegel's thought and the ideas that Freud articulates in these lectures. 'Hegel and Freud' was also the topic of a planned but never finalised article to be written in collaboration with Jacques Lacan. Kojève preserved an early draft of his contribution to this article, dating from July 1936 (cf. Kojève, 2016).
22. The abbreviations refer to the four 'pure types of authority' as described in *The Notion of Authority*. 'F' is the authority of the father, 'J' is the authority of the judge, 'M' is the authority of the master, and 'L' is the authority of the leader (cf. Kojève, 2014, pp. 28–30). In *Neoformations*, the types of authority in parentheses signify less important elements of the global configuration of authority of a particular state.
23. From today's perspective, this argument seems particularly timely in the light of Donald Trump's recent re-election as US president and the ascent of far-right parties to government across Europe.
24. Soviet farmers, Kojève holds, are agricultural 'functionaries' (*Neo*, p. 326).
25. Here, too, it appears interesting to draw parallels between Kojève's argument and the present. Quinn Slobodian (2019) describes a similar split between 'culturalism' and 'biologism' in his work on the legacy of the (politically greatly influential) Austrian School of neo-liberal politico-economic thought.



26. The letters Kojève sent to Moysset have resurfaced in a donation of documents from Moysset's family to the AN in 2024.
27. These are the letters from 24 June 1942, 9 July 1942, 7 December 1942, 14 May 1943, and the undated letter that presumably acknowledges the receipt of the *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right* (on the *Outline* and the Moysset-Kojève correspondence, cf. n. 1 above). On 14 May 43, Moysset moreover acknowledges receipt of a 'notice', although we cannot be certain as to whether he refers here to a philosophical manuscript or a short note in the more literal sense of the term.
28. Moysset has been described by those who knew him as having had a benign character. Raymond Aron referred to Moysset as 'a close friend [...] a remarkable man, of whom I was very fond' (Aron, 1983, p. 30). Moysset moreover seems to have been protective of those he worked with. In his biographical study of Angelo Tasca, Emanuel Rota tells a story of considerable effort on Moysset's part to help Tasca regain his French citizenship during the occupation (Rota, 2013, pp. 139–141). In his last letter to Kojève from 17 January 1944, Moysset seems to express concern for the wellbeing of Eric Weil's family.
29. Kojève's copy of Carl Schmitt's *Gespräch über die Macht und den Zugang zum Machthaber* (which Kojève received as a gift from Schmitt) has Kojève remark '[t]his is all very Marxist!' in the margins at one point. Similarly, in his copy of *Land und Meer* (also received as a gift from Schmitt), Kojève annotates '[e]nd of History' and 'Marx' next to the final paragraph of the book. Kojève indicates he finished reading the former book in January 1957 and the latter book in May 1955.
30. BnF, NAF 28320, box 12, envelope 3, *Compte-rendu manuscrit du séminaire de Kojève sur Pierre Bayle ... 20 juin 1937*, p. 1.
31. BnF, NAF 28320, box 12, envelope 4, ... *étude comparée de l'existence et de l'idéologie de Bayle et Fontenelle 28 juin 1937*, p. 1.
32. BnF, NAF 28320, box 13–1, envelope 4, « *Difficultés et espoirs de l'O.E.C.E.* », *Dactylographie du texte de l'article*, p. 1.
33. BnF, NAF 28320, box 13–2, envelope 6, *Note à Bernard Clappier datée du 24 janvier 1961 sur « La C.E.E. et le problème agricole »*, pp. 1–4.

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