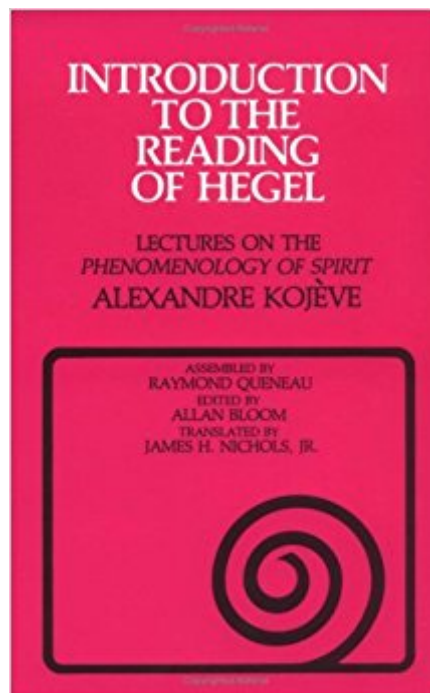




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Introduction To The Reading Of Hegel: Lectures On The Phenomenology Of Spirit



Synopsis

"This collection of Kojève's thoughts about Hegel constitutes one of the few important philosophical books of the twentieth century—a book, knowledge of which is requisite to the full awareness of our situation and to the grasp of the most modern perspective on the eternal questions of philosophy."—Allan Bloom (from the Introduction)

During the years 1933–1939, the Russian-born and German-educated Marxist political philosopher Alexandre Kojève (1902–1968) brilliantly explicated—through a series of lectures—the philosophy of Hegel as it was developed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This collection of lectures—originally compiled by Raymond Queneau and edited for its English-language translation by Allan Bloom—shows the intensity of Kojève's study and thought and the depth of his insight into Hegel's *Phenomenology*. More important—for Kojève was above all a philosopher and not an ideologue—this profound and venturesome work on Hegel will expose the readers to the excitement of discovering a great mind in all its force and power.

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Customer Reviews

During the years 1933-1939, the Marxist political philosopher Alexandre Kojève brilliantly explicated--through a series of lectures--the philosophy of Hegel as it was developed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Based on the major work by Kojève, this collection of lectures was chosen by Bloom to show the intensity of Kojève's study and thought and the depth of his insight into Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Philosophy is a hobby [call me a student] so I didn't feel qualified to comment but here I go anyway for what it's worth. Hegel's "Phenomenology of Spirit" is 'particularly' interesting and I believe still relevant today but also extremely difficult reading and Kojève's book helped fill in some gaps and clarify some issues that had eluded me heretofore so I would strongly recommend it. Kojève is a good teacher and you know where he's coming from - I expected the worse - although on that score I recognized Feuerbach more than Marx in the text. Whereas Hegel starts with Geist or Absolute Spirit [God] differentiating, emptying or 'projecting' himself into reality or creation, negating himself as it were, and then coming to self-consciousness [and self-realization] in and through history by way of human beings [particulars] recognizing themselves in the other, Feuerbach begins with human beings [particulars] projecting the concept of God [Universal] into the heavenly realm. In either case the synthesis of the two [universality and particularity] results in the same concrete universal, singularity, or individuality, ie, existence or being in and for itself. In any case it's a very good investment if you're hooked on Hegel although I wouldn't call it a stand-alone text. Based on my experience I would advise reading other books in addition to Kojève's such as Stephen Houlgate's "An Introduction to Hegel" for the more religious and 'pure' Hegelian aspects which in my opinion provide a much better framework for understanding what Hegel was driving at, especially if you're familiar with the Protestant Reformation, the priesthood of all believers, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the Holy Spirit residing in the hearts and minds of individuals [the concrete universal] in the Christian community rather than outside space and time and otherworldly in the role of the 'master' self, a.k.a., 'the unhappy consciousness.' In the next and final step Hegel simply conceptualizes [sublates or subsumes] the religious [picture] representations while retaining their content. Also comparing the other great systematizer Plotinus' Nous or divine Mind which is unchanging and full of intellectual content to Hegel's Geist or Absolute Spirit [Kojève's the whole or total Being] which acquires its content only by getting involved in history [time] - by becoming a Zeitgeist, a spirit of the age - which Kojève fleshed out in his book under a different guise makes the concept simpler and easier to comprehend.

This book, an 'Introduction to the Reading of Hegel', is a collection of transcripts and notes collected and edited by Raymond Queneau, that is the true beginning of the contemporary 'End of History' debate. But can there ever be a final reconciliation between the innumerable factions of human history? "...[H]e [i.e., Hegel] definitely reconciles himself with all that is and has been, by declaring that there will never more be anything new on earth. ('Introduction', p 168.)" Hegel, according to

Kojeve, thought that History had come to an end; but the question of course is - exactly what does history 'think' - i.e., do? And that boils down to the question: what exactly is humanity doing? There is a not minor problem with making predictions in public that I would like to mention in this short note; these predictions become but another factor in human interactions. Kojève, of course, is quite well aware of this; he regarded his 'philosophy' as little more than propaganda for the Hegelian position. This is no modesty, btw, in our posthistoire one can only make propaganda. (Briefly, according to Kojève, 'History' properly understood ended with Hegel. We live today in a post-history that is nothing but the actualization of Hegelian philosophy throughout the World. When this actualization is complete the Universal Homogenous State then rises.) Thus Kojève regards (correctly, given his premises) all 'philosophy' today as propaganda. But he has, in my humble opinion, spoken too soon. Stanley Rosen, a student of Kojève, alludes to this possibility in the title essay of 'Hermeneutics as Politics': "Had he remained silent, he could never have been refuted." How does one end History, possess the final knowledge - and then change one's mind? (On Kojève's changing his mind see, for instance, the enigmatic 'Note to the Second Edition' in the 'Introduction to the Reading of Hegel'.) But there is more to the problem than that. By revealing the 'necessities' of History long before its final consummation (i.e., the rise of the UHS) he has allowed all enemies of the ongoing globalization to rally to any opposed cause, no matter how ephemeral. But it may turn out that these short-lived oppositional movements are well-nigh innumerable. ...So, exactly what should Kojève, given his intentions, have done? He should have worked in the French Ministry (Kojève is the true architect of the European Union, a building block of the World State), brought out the unjustly ignored, and posthumously published, 'Outline of a Phenomenology of Right', and told Queneau precisely where he could stick his class notes. By publishing the technical, legal and economic 'Outline' and keeping his philosophical speculations permanently to himself he could have (perhaps!) prevented his followers from squabbling over issues that cannot even be decided until the UHS rises...For as Kojève admitted in a letter to Leo Strauss, "Historical action necessarily leads to a specific result (hence: deduction), but the ways that lead to this result, are varied (all roads lead to Rome!). The choice between these ways is free, and this choice determines the content of the speeches about the action and the meaning of the result. In other words: materially history is unique, but the spoken story can be extremely varied, depending on the free choice of how to act." (On Tyranny, p 256). Thus the propaganda (i.e., 'the spoken story', theory) is not essential, and here Kojève remains true to his (peculiar) Marxism, what is crucial is 'material' History. By this Kojève means the technical, economic and legal forces that inexorably (or so it seems) drive us towards the World State (i.e., UHS). Thus Kojève's propaganda and predictions,

best embodied in the 'Introduction', were always secondary. ...Would we be closer to the UHS if the 'Introduction' never saw the light of day? Of course we will never know. But this possibility can never be discounted either.

Good stuff. Glad this is available.

And, of course, the parts that I specifically wanted to read are not even present in this translation. In particular, if you were interested in the references to this text from the footnotes referenced in *Antigones: How the Antigone Legend Has Endured in Western Literature, Art, and Thought* by George Steiner, none of those parts are included in this abridgment of *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*.

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