Alexandre Kojève's Sophia, Or the Misfortunes of Wisdom

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> "A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure, he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. […] The nourishing fruit of the historically understood contains time as a previous but tasteless seed."
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> - Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940)

> "Sophie. Mange un peu plus aujourd'hui. Je ne veux pas que tu t'épuises. Ma chérie, nous voulons te préparer pour la grande mission que tu dois remplir."
>
> - Vladimir Solovʹev, recording in his diary conversations with Sophia in his dreams (1875)

Who is Sophia, and why does she matter to Alexandre Kojève? The role of Sophia, or mystical, feminine Wisdom incarnate, has only recently become an object of scholarly interest in Kojève's philosophy.[1] Most interest in the philosopher's engagement with the concept relegated its significance to the earliest years of his philosophical writings: in his university work in Heidelberg, when, after having recently left Russia and thus still indebted to the national traditions of émigré philosophers, a young Kojève wrote his dissertation on Vladimir Solovʹev (1853-1900), the founder of modern Russian religious philosophy who wrote prominently on Sophia as a unique figure within the Orthodox theological tradition.[2] In order to obtain employment in France, where he finally settled in 1927, Kojève's university work on Solovʹev was expanded into a set of articles in French[3], with a narrower focus on Solovʹev's metaphysics, and in particular the philosopher's messianic visions of Sophia as a promise of a reunion of the material and spiritual worlds that had been foreshadowed by the birth and death of Jesus Christ: Jesus was the "Word of God made

[1] Groys (2012, 2016, 2022); Jubara (2005); Wilson (2022a).
[2] Koschewnikoff (1926).
[3] Kojève (1934, 1935).

flesh," whereas Sophia embodied the reverse process, whereby material flesh itself was made divine.

And yet despite devoting these early writings to Russian religious philosophy, Kojève was rather critical of the Russian tradition, and in particular of the assumed originality of Solovʹev's philosophical ideas. He remarked that Solov'ev had mostly developed a religious philosophical system entirely derivative of that of Schelling, and through him of a much broader tradition of Christian mysticism that had ultimately been absorbed by German idealism: "everything he says of the Absolute and its 'other' is in sum nothing more than a very simplified and impoverished paraphrase of certain speculations by Schelling, which, to this point, merely follow and develop the thought of Jacob Boehme."[4] Such sardonic remarks suggest that Kojève took relatively little from Solovʹev or even Russian religious philosophy entirely, which had served as his first, sustained object of scholarly inquiry. In this line of reasoning, Kojève's subsequent effort at articulating an explicitly atheist philosophy in his manuscript *Atheism* (1998/1930) marked a formal shift in his philosophical pursuits: from an early, cursory interest in (Orthodox) Russian philosophy and into an atheist historicism articulated through a thorough, if eclectic, reading of Hegel.[5] Despite the significance of post-historical wisdom in this latter phase of Kojève's writings, the centrality of Sophia—itself a mystical metaphor for post-historical feminine wisdom, invented by Boehme and adopted and popularized by Solovʹev—was allegedly abandoned together with the Russian religious tradition.

This historiography, however, has since changed dramatically. The last decade has witnessed an enormous return of interest in Kojève, spurred on by a methodical indexing of his collected

[4] Idem (1934), p. 544.
[5] This article does not examine in detail the connection between *Atheism* and Kojève's interest in Solovʹev, but a thorough analysis can be found in Wilson (2022a) and Jubara (2023).

papers, housed at the Bibliothèque nationale de France and first made available to the public in 2007. Among them, the manuscript *Sophia, Philo-Sophia, and Phenomenology*, written by Kojève in 1940-1941 yet left unpublished until this year, lends credence to the idea that Sophia might have been a more lasting, significant concern for Kojève, and that the philosopher was still writing on the notion of feminine wisdom well beyond his early years working on Russian religious philosophy and Solovʹev. Furthermore, a second, longer title for this manuscript, found on a subsequent page, illustrates how Kojève's interest in Sophia had evolved conceptually beyond the religious dimensions that had framed his early study of the concept: "A system of philosophy. Phenomenology. An attempt at a dialectical introduction to philosophy based on Hegel's 'phenomenology' and interpreted in light of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism."

The philosopher had thus begun to align his study of Sophia not only with his well-known reading of Hegel, made in his seminars at the École pratique des hautes études years (EPHE) from 1933 to 1939, but also with his sympathies for Stalinism and interest in Marxist philosophies of history. Purged of its theological relationship to Christian incarnation, Kojève's Sophia nevertheless remained ever-present, as the feminine embodiment of wisdom at the completion of the historical process. After the Second World War, Kojève had transitioned away from his revolutionary views of history (and his overt sympathies toward Stalinism) and into the heady, postwar world of French foreign affairs and bureaucratic administration. And yet even then, in the more varied writings of Kojève's late career, one once more finds the distilled meaning of this "new world order" in a reified image of the feminine. In a series of charming, if cynical, reviews of the novels of Françoise Sagan, Kojève finds the end of history, and the postwar liberal order embodied in Sagan's preferred protagonists: the French teenage girl. Figures who for Kojève emerge on the other side of a protracted history of masculine, heroic struggle, these young women

once more recall Kojève's interest in the posthistorical as a specifically feminine notion of satisfied inactivity and embodied wisdom.

Sophia appears therefore as a consistent motif in Kojève's philosophy, and this article traces its centrality within disparate periods of his career. In doing so, I make two primary claims: first, I contend that Kojève's initial interest in Sophia ought to be seen as a byproduct of early twentieth-century Russian interest in Sophiology. In concrete terms, while such an interest stems from his relationship with the émigré community writ large, it is highly probable that Kojève first developed an interest in the concept through his close work with Alexandre Koyré. His mentor who had initially conducted the seminars on Hegel at the EPHE before bequeathing them to Kojève, Koyré had written a seminal study of Jacob Boehme—and Sophia—while at the EPHE.[6] Koyré's examination of Boehme and Sophia was widely read and well received, both within émigré circles (Koyré also had emigrated from Russia and regularly wrote on Russian thought) as well as in the broader philosophical community, a fact which should encourage us to rethink the place of Boehme and Sophia in Koyré and Kojève's joint reading of Hegel at the EPHE.

My second, broader claim is that by centering Kojève's Sophia within his writings, one begins to see the surfacing of gendered dimensions that had long undergirded his philosophical thought. In his initial interest in Sophia within religious philosophy, opposition between male activity and female passivity is reconciled at the end of messianic history, in a quasi-androgynous, mystic union that had been first elaborated by Boehme before being assumed into Russian thought via Solov'ev. In Kojève's review of the novels of Françoise Sagan, written closer toward the end of his life, an acerbic description of a postwar end to masculine struggle takes shape in an idle, sexually liberated

[6] Koyré (1929).

young woman on the beaches of Southern France. Reading these images in tandem, and as historical bookends to Kojève's lifework, highlights the centrality of reified masculinity and femininity as philosophical markers within his account of history/post-history, activity/passivity, desire/wisdom, and so on. In other words, by carefully reading Kojève's various accounts of Sophia across his career, one gets a better sense of the philosopher's inherent views on the role played by gender in some of his most significant contributions to continental philosophy. This is an essential but understudied aspect of Kojève's philosophy, given his significant legacy within post-structuralism, queer theory[7], and the Lacanian psychoanalytical tradition, all fields with their own stake in theories of gender, sexuality, and identity.[8]

Sophiology, Koyré, and Boehme Among the Russians

These gendered dimensions to Kojève's philosophy, and his fascination with desire as constitutive element of human history, are inextricable from his initial linkages to the Russian religious tradition abroad. In his initial work on Vladimir Solovʹev and Sophia, Kojève took advantage of a rich, and at the time flourishing, theological tradition with a fervent interest in centering sexuality, gender, and eros as guiding philosophical principles. In the so-called "Russian Religious Renaissance" of the fin-de-siècle, a rapid modernization of Russian society was accompanied by a renewed interest in rethinking Russian thought through a return to early Orthodox theology and patristics. Religious thought appealed to a Russian intelligentsia that was then retreating from positivist and materialist philosophy and returning to idealist philosophy, accompanied by broader, mystical experimentations within modernism and the Silver Age. This introspective turn coincided, moreover, with growing attention to the social and philosophical roles

[7] Butler (1999).
[8] For more on the connection between Kojève and Lacan, who had faithfully attended the former's seminars on Hegel, see Wilson (2022b).

played by gender and sexuality. Propelled by the rise of psychoanalysis and emergent fields of sexological research, fin-de-siècle Russian culture viewed the political and social transformations of the prerevolutionary period through new theories of love and desire. In its efforts at modernization of Orthodox thought, Russian religious philosophers regularly wrote on love as both a theological and social force, and such writings exhibited an increased openness to shaping fundamental theological principles around more modern, psychoanalytical accounts of sexuality and desire.

While their roots could be found in a much older history of Christian theology and philosophy, the explosive interest in Sophia and Sophiology at the turn of the century was therefore a byproduct of this convergence of religious philosophy, mysticism, and nascent sexology.[9] Vladimir Solovʹov, as one of the guiding forces of the Russian Religious Renaissance and the modern founder of Sophiology, had helped to popularize an eroticized notion of wisdom as the divine feminine. Solovʹev had effectively founded the modern Russian Orthodox understanding of divine incarnation, or theosis, through his theory of Godmanhood [*bogochelovechestvo*], the notion of the historical process as the incarnation of the divine within human terrestrial (i.e., history is the process by which man merges with and becomes God). However, as many scholars[10], devotees,[11] and even critics[12] of Solovʹev have remarked, the religious philosopher borrowed heavily from the thought of Jakob Boehme in his articulation of Sophia and a mystic, Christian cosmology of eroticized, spiritual union.

[9] I lack space to discuss the longer history of "Sophia" as an embodiment of wisdom prior to its use within modern Russian religious philosophy. Its history passes through ancient Greek philosophy, the Jewish Kabbalah, and various Christian gnostic traditions long before it was manifest in Boehme's vernacular pious writings. See Plested (2022: p. 13-69).
[10] David (1962); Coates (2020, p. 246).
[11] Berdiaev (1930).
[12] Kojève (1934, p. 544).

There remains some debate as to whether Solovʹev took his visions of Sophia directly from a reading of Boehme, or whether his Sophiology might be better understood as reflected through the more modern lens of Friedrich Schelling[13] or even Franz von Baader[14], as both played a role in the introduction of Boehme's mysticism into the German philosophical training that was received by many Russian theologians in the nineteenth century.[15] Regardless, it was after his first encounters with reading Boehme and theosophy while a student at the Moscow Theological Academy that Solovʹev subsequently began to identify frequent visions he had had of the "Eternal Feminine" with the notion of Sophia.[16] The most significant of such visions occurred in 1875 on a research trip to the British Museum in London to study Indian and Christian gnostic texts, where Solov'ev claimed to have spoken to Sophia directly, who encouraged him to travel to Egypt in pursuit of further, ancient manifestations of an Orientalized, gnostic feminine wisdom.

These eroticized, mystical encounters with Sophia confirmed for Solovʹev the significance of a Divine feminine figure who would realize a sensual union of spirit and matter at the end of history, a unification that itself formed the bedrock of his theory of Godmanhood as spiritual incarnation. Both Sophia and Godmanhood were based in a notion of the Christian Fall that directly parallels an account given in Boehme's own writings: the initial Fall is inextricably linked to the material, earthly world, exemplified in the image of Adam and his relationship with Eve, who have erred and lost a connection to the divine through original sin. Sophia, by contrast, embodies the innate potential of the fallen flesh, and the material world, to once more transform and merge with the divine. For Solovʹev, this connection with God or the religious Absolute is understood as total

[13] Groys (2022).
[14] Koyré (1929, p. 213-214).
[15] The relationship between Solovʹev and Schelling is beyond the scope of this present article, which is more concerned with Kojève's relation to Boehme and the (Russian) theological tradition. For a substantive account of the interactions between Solovʹev, Schelling, and Boehme, see Valliere (2000).
[16] David (1962, p. 58-60).

unity through *eros*, and thus presented in a reified depiction of Sophia as eroticized, but spiritual, femininity who enacts this unification through a form of metaphysical copulation.

Thus although Solovʹev was often reluctant to name his sources, this depiction of Sophia was borrowed from Boehme, who had outlined a near identical description of Sophia. It was therefore natural that, after Solovʹev's death in 1900, Russian philosophers working in the tradition of Sophiology would profess an interest in Boehme's own writings on the topic and return to the German mystic. In the early 1920s, such philosophers were almost exclusively working abroad—in Germany and France—after Lenin's expulsion of religious and other antagonistic intellectuals from Soviet Russia in 1922. Russian religious philosophers played an outsourced role in émigré intellectual life in the interwar period; in Paris, debates over Sophiology, and Jakob Boehme, dominated theological discussions at the Institut de théologie orthodoxe St.-Serge, founded by exiled religious figures and a focal point for émigré philosophical discussions. In the institute's influential journal *The Way* [*Putʹ*], Solovʹev, Sophia, and Boehme were perpetual topics of conversation. Nikolai Berdiaev, for example, undoubtedly the most well-known figure among these exiled philosophers, served as the editor of *The Way* and often lectured to broader French audiences about Russian philosophy, including on Boehme and his relationship to Orthodox theology. Ironically, this initial interest in Boehme through the Russian tradition eventually positioned Berdiaev as an expert on the German mystic.[17]

[17] For example, two significant essays by Berdiaev on Boehme ("'Ungrund' and Freedom" and "The Doctrine of Sophia and the Androgyne. Jacob Böhme and Russian Sophiological Trends") accompany the first translation of the latter's *Mysterium Magnum* into French in 1945. See Boehme (1945).

This renewed interest in Boehme was moreover encouraged by the work of their fellow émigré Koyré, who in 1929 published a major study on the German mystic.[18] Koyré's *La philosophie de Jacob Boehme*, based on his *thèse d'état*, quickly became the standard scholarly work on Boehme. A philosopher of science who, through the influence of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl[19], had developed an interest in the interaction between scientific thought and religious paradigms, Koyré's text on Boehme illustrates both his own relationship to émigré Russian Sophiology, as well as his influence on Kojève's later assimilation of Sophia into his own atheist philosophical system.

In his monograph on Boehme, Koyré identifies two structuring problems within Boehme's philosophical system: the problem and nature of evil, and the connected problem of the relationship between God and the material world.[20] Thus for Boehme the tripart hypostasis of Christianity (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) designates a solution to these problems, in which "the world and God must be united and separated at the same time."[21] In other words, how might God be both of this world, and also in relation with it? How does God create world, if it is a manifestation of Him, and does God therefore create evil, which is also an inevitable aspect of worldly life? These problems remain a constant in Boehme's oeuvre, and their possible resolution is consequently articulated in differing, poetic Biblical images across his quasi-allegorical texts—most significantly, in his theory of Sophia.

[18] Koyré, in turn, attributed the growing interest in Boehme in the 1920s to the three-hundredth year anniversary of his death in 1924, which had prompted alleged discussion of publishing a new edition of his collected works. See Koyré (1926: p. 116).
[19] Zambelli (2019, p. 212-213).
[20] Koyré (1929, p. 72).
[21] Ibid., p. 74.

Although his study of Boehme divides its analysis of the mystic's writing into three biographical periods, Koyré focused much of his attention on Boehme's *De Tribus Principiis* or *The Three Principles* (1619) and *Mysterium Magnum* (1623). In this first text, Boehme's three outlined principles constitute an effort to formally distinguish between God, world, and man's place between the two. The cosmos are originally constructed by Boehme in two constitutive elements: material paradise, the created world, and the divine, uncreated matter of God. He thus differentiates between "*paradise* or the *element* – of this lower world, of the created heavens" and "the heavens of the angels, and the primary matter of this world from divine 'matter' and the body of Wisdom."[22] There are therefore two worlds or principles, a created and an uncreated matter, that are separated from one another after the fall of Lucifer, yet they are eventually mediated by a third principle: man, who possesses a soul and thus is destined for eternal life, whereas "this world by contrast is temporal and […] will be destroyed."[23]

Sophia, as a divine partner to Adam, becomes a means of reconciling these two matters. In his retelling of Adam's fall, Boehme posits the first man as corporeal and yet made "of a purer element," i.e., he is total and devoid of organs, noting in particular his lack of sexual or bestial biological functions. Once Adam has "fallen," however, his body takes on a more primitive form and differentiates: it acquires a terrestrial biology and becomes sexualized ("his heavenly body became flesh and blood, and his strong virtue […] became bones").[24] It is at this point that Eve appears, "for it is only after Adam's fall, having become an animal, that he needs a companion."[25] Koyré illustrates in his study how the notion of the celestial and terrestrial worlds had already been

[22] Ibid., p. 233.
[23] Ibid., p. 224.
[24] Böhme (1910, p.225).
[25] Koyré (1929, p.228).

gendered in Boehme's rendering (masculine celestial and feminine terrestrial, respectively), so that Eve emerges from the latter, terrestrial world as a symbol of Adam's animalization, sexuation, and the general individuation that takes place within the created matter.

Yet if Eve is defined by her sinful corporeality and is identified quite literally with "created matter" (i.e., made from Adam's rib), she is juxtaposed to an eternal, virginal, celestial companion for Adam that is Sophia or Divine Wisdom, and that he has lost from the Fall. If at this stage, however, there is a clear distinction between Eve and Sophia, Koyré argues that in subsequent works Boehme began to equivocate this "double aspect" of feminine nature in Christian theology: "that of celestial love and terrestrial love, the eternal virgin and the *cagastric* individual Eve."[26] Rather than viewed as an indication of Adam's fallenness, Eve increasingly becomes a necessary, individuated and terrestrial manifestation of Sophia. Furthermore, later in his *Mysterium Magnum*, Boehme begins to view the Fall as an essential component to Christian cosmology, and the "emptying" of God or the Absolute into the created matter is needed for a divine reading of history. This becomes Boehme's notion of *Ungrund*: an indeterminateness or abyss of nothingness that precedes being, and into which God pours himself as created matter, in order to establish himself in an act of revelation and self-actualization.[27] The result is history: or, the historical (temporal) process of individuation and determination within the Absolute that is innate to God's dynamism but that does not concede God as Himself historical or "born in time."[28]

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[26] Ibid., p.231.

[27] The notion of the *Ungrund* becomes of great significance for Schelling, who relies upon it to articulate his philosophy of radical freedom, differentiation, and identity. See Schelling (1860, p. 358-360).

[28] See Berdiaeff (1945, p. 14): "this should not be understood to mean that [God] is born in a temporal process, like in Fichte or Hegel, but that the internal and eternal life of God manifests itself in a dynamic process, of tragedy in eternity, of combat against the darkness of Non-Being."

Sophia, and "sexual division" becomes increasingly central to Boehme's cosmological visions: his vision of the *Ungrund*, as the "other" of the Absolute, is tied to the sexuation of Man in the Fall. If the initial inauguration of humanity and the historical process is tied to individual sexuation, and the creation of Eve, it concludes in a higher, spiritual conjunction with Sophia. In other words, the historical realization of Divine Wisdom is a gendered, historical process, both in the initial "severing" of humanity from God, and in its final reconciliation with God as a union with Sophia. In his own reading of Sophia through his philosophy of Godmanhood, this gendered dimension allowed for Solovʹev to imagine the final, collective unification of humanity in "total unity" in eroticized terms. In *La Russe et l'Église Universelle* (1889), Solovʹev describes this unification as accomplished through universal history and "the triple fruit which it bears: the perfect woman, or divinized nature, the perfect man or the Godman, and the perfect society of God with human beings—the definitive incarnation of Divine Wisdom."[29] Subsequent Russian sophiologists followed suit, yet it must be said that Boehme's and Solov'ev's Sophias, however, were not viewed as identical. As Berdiaev himself describes it, Boehme largely preferred to associate Sophia with the celestial Virgin, whereas the Russian version of Sophia became much more eroticized and terrestrial: "with regard to Solov'ev […] it is unfortunately impossible to say that his teaching on Sophia was entirely chaste." [30]

While Koyré outlined the philosophical (and historicist) implications for Boehme's Sophia, his reading was critiqued by émigré religious philosophers for its alleged attempt to secularize what was viewed as a theological depiction of poetic vision. Berdiaev, for example, lauded Koyré's

[29] Solovʹev (1922, p. 259).
[30] Berdiaev (1930: p. 34-62). Curiously, however, if Boehme history is based in individuation based on sexuation (Adam and Eve), Berdiaev by contrast sees Boehme's reunification with Sophia as not based in sexual difference at all. Instead, for Berdiaev this is indicative of an inherent "androgyny" within all of humanity, including Christ, whom he views as androgynous in nature because of his dual material and spiritual aspect. See Berdiaeff (1945, p. 29-33).

efforts at introducing Boehme to a broader audience, yet he nevertheless admonishes him for the study's overly technical nature, one which ("like most who do scholarship in the history of ideas") reduces the origin of Boehme's ideas to broader historical or scientific trends of the century, rather than acknowledging his own "creative genius."[31] This criticism reflected the fact that Koyré generally studied religious thought in light of scientific cosmologies, and that in the study Koyré identified a source for Boehme's notion of *Ungrund*, as well as his theories of celestial and terrestrial (or primary and secondary) matter, in a folk popularity of nascent astronomical science in the late sixteenth century, specifically the work of Johannes Kepler.[32]

These attacks illustrate the similarities of Koyré's reading to Kojève's later work on Solovʹev's Sophia.[33] Kojève and Koyré had already been in close collaboration at the time of the book's writing: the two had first met while both still lived in Germany. By the time Koyré had published his study of Boehme in 1929, he had already begun lecturing on Hegel at the EPHE (sessions which were attended by Kojève), and Kojève's his first article on Solovʹev is published a year later.[34] This collaboration is reflected in the influence of Koyré's Boehme on Kojève's reading of Solovʹev. This influence can be seen most clearly in his later, more substantial article entitled "The Religious Metaphysics of Vladimir Solovʹev" (1934/1935), in which Kojève focused on Solovʹev's development of two definitions of the Absolute as he had developed them in his *Critique of Abstract Principles* (*Kritika otvlechennykh nachal*, 1880): a detached, totalized Absolute and an Absolute that is the sum aggregate of all things gradually assembled over history.

[31] Berdiaev (1929, P. 117).
[32] Koyré was more generous to Berdiaev. In his review of the French translation of *Mysterium Magnum* (Boehme 1945), Koyré describes Berdiaev's essays as "substantial and interest studies [that] form a good introduction" (1947/1948, p. 216).
[33] The criticism that Koyré overly "secularized" his reading of Boehme further resonates with Kojève's own secularization of a religious worldview in *Atheism* (1930/1998). For more on this connection, see Wilson (2022a).
[34] Koschewnikoff (1930).

The distinction between these two Absolutes is a direct borrowing from the Boehmian tradition and its division of "created" and "uncreated" matter, and the reconciliation between the two is embodied in Sophia as the embodiment of a historicist understanding of Christian revelation. In assembling and unifying matter in an eroticized union with the total (undifferentiated) Absolute, Sophia is Divine Wisdom in its self-actualization within humanity: humanity is fully satisfied and united in purpose and action.

Yet Kojève's study, already dismissive of what he viewed as Solovʹev's poor imitation of Boehme, focused instead on the last period of the Russian philosopher's thought: his pessimistic reading of a messianic, Christian philosophy of history in *Three Conversations on War, Progress, and the End of History* (1899). In that work, Solovʹev wrote on the arrival of the anti-Christ as a figure who discredits the possibility of (terrestrial) humankind to reunite with (spiritual, transcendental) God in the Absolute: such reunification is viewed as false. This depiction undermined the premise that had undergirded Solovʹev's theory of Godmanhood as the historical divinization and actualization of humanity. For Kojève, *Three Conversations* is thus a rebuttal of the unification of the two Absolutes (an uncreated unitotal Absolute and created differentiated Absolute) "from that point on history is for Solov′ev no longer the gradual reconstitution of godmanhood and the return of fallen Sophia to God, but rather a perpetual battle of the principle of evil with that of the good, a battle that, though it ends with the victory of the latter, at the same time has as a consequence the annihilation of a large part of the empirical world: the kingdom of God lies on the other side of history that itself is abandoned to the dominion of evil."[35] This, Kojève

[35] Ibid., p. 306.

claims, illustrates that Solov′ev had at the end of his life been slowly moving "towards a specific essence of the historical" within his philosophy of Sophia.

Religious Russian philosophers before Kojève had attempted, and struggled, to reconcile the eternal nature of God and the Absolute (uncreated matter) with the historicist concept of Wisdom (created matter) as Sophia. The topic became a major source of discussion in emigration.[36] Sergei Bulgakov, for example, a prominent and controversial émigré sophiologist who worked in Paris the same years as Kojève, took great pains to elaborate an account of a "divine Sophia" and a "created Sophia." The first, divine Sophia was ever-present and eternal, a development from Solov'ev's first Absolute. The second, however, was "spatio-temporal," created across time in accordance with the cosmological history of God's creation, in accordance with Solov'ev's second or becoming Absolute. Bulgakov stressed, however, that these two Sophias were fundamentally two sides of the same coin: "They are one Sophia but distinguished according to their mode of being; as an ideal reality with an eternal mode, and as an entelechy of the created, in the mode of the autonomous being proper to the world of creatures. It is precisely because of the unity of Sophia under its two forms that the world is created and is not, that it belongs to the temporal world by its being and to eternity in virtue of its principle."[37]

Both Koyré and Kojève were in clear dialogue with these debates, yet for Kojève such contradictions within Sophia could only be resolved by her secularization, something he claimed that Solov′ev himself had realized at the end of his career: when his philosophy of Godmanhood reached its logical conclusion in humanity on the other side of history and "abandoned to the dominion of evil." One ramification of this secularization of Sophia could be found in *Atheism*, in

[36] Arjakovsky (2013, p. 384-402).
[37] Bulgakov (2002, p. 60-61).

which Kojève identified a homogeneity of material things ("created" matter) that emerged once the religious path to God ("uncreated matter") had been closed. Yet we might also find its trace in his seminars on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in which Kojève accounted for wisdom as the conclusion of a secular philosophy of history.

Sophia as a Socialist, and Then Snob

In his seminars on Hegel at the EPHE (1933-1939), Kojève described history as inaugurated and propelled by the human desire for recognition. To briefly summarize Kojève's well-known reading of the *Phenomenology*, history is the process by which humanity struggles for recognition and labors to transform nature into its own image. Foregrounding the fourth chapter of the *Phenomenology* (on the dialectic of Lord and Bondsman), the subject acquires self-certainty through its external recognition by another. In Hegel's initial account of Absolute Spirit, and the externalization of its self-revelation across history, one already sees a debt to Boehme's cosmic vision of the Absolute and Sophia: Hegel describes history as a "*conscious, self-mediating* process—Spirit emptied out into Time," and the self-revelation and externalization necessarily made by Absolute Spirit in the *Phenomenology* invokes Boehme's own account of God's need to empty and self-differentiate through the *Ungrund*.[38]

However, by centering desire as the constitutive element of human history (a centering absent in Hegel's original), Kojève offers a clue to his lingering interest in Sophia, or post-historical Wisdom, and its grounding in a gendered account of historicism. This historical process of recognition concludes when "Man no longer acts in strict sense of the word, that is, when he no longer negates or transforms the natural and social given through bloody Struggle and creative Work," and humanity no longer seeks to transform the world when it has fully realized his desires:

[38] Hegel (1977, p. 492). A detailed account of Boehme's substantial legacy in German idealism, see Mayer (1999).

"If Man is truly and fully satisfied by what *is*, he no longer desires anything real and no longer changes therefore his reality, ceasing as such to really change himself."[39] Groys has aptly described this final, post-historical moment in Kojève's philosophy of history as "post-coital" in its elimination of desire: "The end of history is possible and inevitable because there is no such thing as infinite desire."[40]

Having no further desires, humankind is satisfied, ceases to labor, and wisdom thus emerges. Kojève's notion juxtaposes history, desire, and difference on one side, and post-history, wisdom, and homogeneity on the other. In Boehme's original vision of humanity and history, the fall of Adam and the engendering of Eve marks the individuation of matter, a cosmological account further eroticized by the Solovyovian tradition. Sexual desire becomes an earthly affair. In both Boehme and Kojève's accounts, Adam's (or humanity's) unification with Sophia signals an end to terrestrial desire. And yet what might it mean, in practical terms, to no longer desire anything?

In 1940-1941, while still sympathetic to the Soviet Union, Kojève had placed this wisdom in the Stalinist project.[41] During the Nazi occupation of Paris, as various intellectuals fled the capital, Kojève had bequeathed to Georges Bataille, who had taken up work at the French National Library, a copy of his manuscript *Sophia, Philo-Sophia, and Phenomenology*, before leaving for the south. According to at least two accounts,[42] the manuscript was – despite its substantial differences – a version of the EPHE seminars made suitable for Stalin himself. In it, Kojève describes history as inherent to *philo*-sophy, or the *desire* for wisdom as it unfolds over time. By contrast, post-history is defined by a state of Sophia or Wisdom, a "full 'awareness' or self-

[39] Kojève (1968, p. 547).
[40] Groys (2012, p. 158).
[41] For Kojève's Soviet sympathies in emigration, see Wilson (2021).
[42] Weslati (2014); Reis (2000, p. 69).

awareness, expressed in the fact that man can *himself* respond convincingly to *all* reasonable questions that *can* be asked to him, or that he himself might ask with regard to his life and his actions within the time and space of the material world."[43] Post-historical Sophia is thus an absence of desire for anything, as its citizenry are fully capable of managing and resolving the meaning of their own actions.

For Kojève in the 1940s, this citizenry was the Soviet proletariat, yet in his manuscript he is once again clear that the (atheist) proletariat are themselves a development from a larger theological notion of the realized collective: "one need only substitute for the notion of 'divine tribunal' the (Hegelian) notion of 'the tribunal of history,' that is the tribunal of all humanity, and then replace the concepts of Church and priest with that of the ('ideal') State and representatives of civil society, to transform this Christian notion into a revolutionary and socialist conception (a conception that dates back to Hegel and which is ever since one of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism)."[44] Certainly part of Stalinism's appeal for Kojève was its resolution of the part and the whole in its notion of totality, a cosmological conception that resonated with the notion of Sophia as itself a concretized, post-historical totality. If in Boehme's account of Sophia, two matters (created and uncreated) struggled to be reconciled within his Christian philosophy of history, Stalinism claims to succeed in its overcoming of the Leninist dialectical model of spontaneity [*stikhiinost'*] and consciousness [*soznatel'nost'*]: a revolutionary dialectic of the unplanned actions of strikes, protests, and so on which constitute history (spontaneity), and the deliberate, guided

[43] Kojève (1941, p. 26). I am indebted to Rambert Nicolas for having shared a draft of his transcription of this archived manuscript.
[44] Ibid., p. 36.

control of actions by political structures like the vanguard party, with an eye toward their larger, systematic significance (consciousness).[45]

In Kojève's philosophical account of Stalinism, the resolution of the dialectic of spontaneity and consciousness becomes furthermore a resolution of (active) actions and (passive) contemplation. Rather than viewing Sophia/Wisdom as a moment of pure passivity, having overcoming the need for action that determined history, Kojève writes of this Wisdom as an ethical, *active* passivity or contemplation: "it is not a question of two qualities independent of one another that then find themselves reunited in a contingent way and that could subsequently be isolated from one another, it is instead a question of sides or two aspects of the very same thing. And if one considers wisdom from the perspective of *knowledge* [*connaisssance*], one must define it as a perfect *knowledge* [*savoir*], but if one invokes it from the point of view of action, one must say that is it a perfect *ethics*."[46]

However, if the *Sophia* manuscript sheds light on how Kojève understood post-historical wisdom within the context of Stalinism, his enthusiasm for the revolutionary project of the Soviet Union had already clearly faded by the 1950s.[47] Sophia as feminine wisdom moved elsewhere, deeper into the postwar Western political order whose contours Kojève had begun to craft as an advisor to the French government. Oddly enough, she reemerges in an ironic fashion in 1956, in a review that Kojève writes of Françoise Sagan's *Bonjour tristesse* (1954) and *Un certain sourire* (1956).[48] Entitled "The Last New World," Kojève's review describes Sagan's novels as

[45] Lenin first discusses the dialectic of spontaneity/consciousness in *What is to be done?* (1902). Groys (2022) rightfully identifies a communality between sophiology and dialectical materialism, in its "dreamlike logic of the erotic relationship between party and people, or spirit and matter, and only finds its redemption in the eschatological prospect of their eternal marriage in communism."
[46] Kojève (1941, p. 29).
[47] See for example Kojève 1993**,** as well as Jacobs 2023.
[48] Kojève (1956).

characteristic of a post-historical world beyond struggle. Its emblematic citizen is Sagan's preferred protagonist: the young, sexually liberated woman, or in Kojève's words "a very-very-young-young French girl who has the (literary) honor of revealing to the crowds (of her male and female readers) the world which has been wrought by this glory."[49]

If Sophia symbolized a reconciliation of activity and passivity in its various instantiations (uncreated/created matter, spontaneity/consciousness), then Sagan's protagonists once more place such reconciliations in feminine hands. Cécile, the protagonist of *Bonjour tristesse*, spends her summers pursuing teen love in the south of France, in tension with the authority of her womanizer father, an echo of past masculine glory and himself juggling two separate love affairs. Her pursuit of sensuous pleasure presented for Kojève one last, definitive world in which action persevered, but never transcended the realm of the private: "this strange, last new world which is indeed ours and which, as we know, has as its specific characteristic, distinguishing it from all others, the fact that there is virtually no longer in it any true wars or revolutions, and in which consequently one will soon no longer be able to die gloriously, other than in a bed (private or public)."[50]

In his seminars at the EPHE, Kojève had described Hegel's reading of the rise of civil life in antiquity, in which the formation of the state, and dying for one's polis, pulled humanity from the enclosures of the private home: "as long as man is a non-citizen, a private, individual person, he is a shadow, that is, a death. To die on the field of battle is the deed of a Citizen; to die in one's own bed fulfills the individual as a member of the Family."[51] Yet Kojève's final invocation of

[49] Ibid., p. 704. Kojève's depiction, caustic and quasi-misogynistic in tone, nevertheless presages the "primacy of the young girl" as ideal consumer and citizen in Tiqqun's *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* (2012, p. 15): "In reality, the Young-Girl is simply the *model citizen* as redefined by consumer society since World War I, in *explicit* response to the revolutionary menace. As such, the Young-Girl is a *polar figure*, orienting, rather than dominating, outcomes."
[50] Ibid., p. 707.
[51] Ibid., p. 120.

Sophia as a young, liberated woman returns dialectically to the same such moment, and marks a *contemplative* or conscious return of action to the private.

Such a move recalls a now-infamous footnote, added to the second published edition of the seminars, in which Kojève claimed that after history, humanity would revert dialectically to an earlier form of animality: **"**If Man becomes an animal again, his art, his love, and his games must also become purely 'natural' again. One would have to admit therefore that at the end of History, humans would build their edifices and works just as birds build their nests and spiders weave their webs, and would perform concerts just as frogs and cicadas, would play like young animals do, and would indulge love like adult beasts do."[52] This final image of Kojève returns humanity and its love back to Eden, satisfied and whole before the Fall that Boehme had believed to have separated and individuated them. As Kojève's fascination with Japanese culture (and the "*snobisme*" of its maintenance of rituals) suggests, this post-historical, animal order would not disavow ceremony or pleasure.[53] Yet it no longer constituted transformative action, but something else entirely.

In his review of Sagan's novels, Kojève locates the "paternity" of these young, female citizens in Hegel, "who saw clearly and predicted the nature of this child announced by him to the world."[54] Yet Kojève also identifies another figure who anticipated this new world order: the Marquis de Sade, for whom "in the new free world, everything would be committed in private; especially crimes, necessarily seen as (nobly gratuitous) acts of an egalitarian and fraternal

[52] Kojève (1968, p. 509-510).
[53] Ibid., p. 511: "the *Snobisme* in its purest form created disciplines negating the 'natural' or 'animal' given which far exceeded, in terms of efficacy, those that were born, in Japan or elsewhere, from 'historic' Action, that is war and revolutionary Struggles or forced labor."
[54] Idem. (1956, p. 702).

Liberty."[55] For Sade, this privatization of sexuality and violence signaled an era of enlightened action: in the boudoir misfortunes of Juliette or Justine (or Sophia), a new materialism—libertinism— was born that offered an intimate view of the revolutionary, historical potential of the Terror, what Hegel had once described as "the fury of destruction" in the liberated elements.[56] For Kojève, it was once more proof that history, and the age of heroes, was dead.

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[55] Ibid., p. 703.

[56] Hegel 1977, p. 359: "Universal freedom, therefore, can produce neither a positive work nor a deed; there is left for it only *negative* action; it is merely the *fury* of destruction."

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