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The Dialogue Lacan-Kojeve on Bureaucracy and on Empire

Eric Laurent

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The contribution of psychoanalysis to political science and to the interpretation of the social bond does not confine itself to the Church and the Army as is often the impression upon reading the literature. Before arriving at the Lacanian writing of the discourses, we should not forget an intermediary mesh link, the analysis of bureaucracies such as Lacan had thereupon conducted. He did not do it alone. He proceeded with the Freudian operation on a conception of bureaucracy derived from that of Alexandre Kojève. The latter professed a doctrine of what we could call *generalised bureaucracy*. Lacan adds therein the grain of sand of *jouissance*, with surprising consequences.

What is a bureaucracy in this sense? We have forgotten how the development of organisations as instruments of administration was generalised during a period of reconstruction of the world that followed the second World War. We often limit the phenomenon to that of the establishment of the bureaucracy necessary to the functioning of the *Welfare State*. Many other bureaucracies have emerged and have installed themselves in our landscape in order to administer larger and larger social ensembles, both national and international. There have been bureaucracies destined to administer the economy, diverse reconstructions, projects, made to foil crises. Then the bureaucracies of financial industry: the banks, essential to anti-crisis devices. One must add to this the domain which changes its regulations with the new functions of the provident-state: insurance. Internationally, every new field comes to be launched with new International Institutions. Beginning with, of course, military pacts. Following that, the United Nations and all their annexes. Then, the whole European project, which takes diverse forms. From the Economic Community of Coal and Steel (CECA) upto the European Economic Community (CEE). Post Stalinistic Russia itself becomes a bureaucracy, devoured by multiple competing bureaucracies. In America, the multinationals attain an unprecedented degree of integration. Let us stop there.

There have been those who thought that the phenomenon could not be described in univocal terms. The ownership of the means of production was the radical discriminant which rendered the phenomenon equivocal. In opposition, Alexandre Kojève reads there the very realisation of the Hegelian vision of History, on a new scale. In the preceding century, Hegel situates the *bureaucratic* stratum facing civilised society. He gives the place to a new clericalism of functionaries of the universal. Kojève considers that the war aftermath confirms the world of bureaucracies in a world where not only the clerk, but also the warrior, have both disappeared in the modern technical army. For him, the form which the ownership of capital takes matters very little, it is the extension of the bureaucratic form which is the essential element of civilisation, even more so than the technique which is an instrument for it. He immediately draws from this a practical consequence for himself. This wise sage par excellence reabsorbs himself in the bureaucracy of international negotiations at the heart of French administration, beginning from the moment when he was certain that the end of history was taking place, he did not remain longer than to negotiate that which could have brought about the universal homogeneous State.

For Kojève the principle of differentiation came from another source. He launches it in a text which remained unpublished for a long time. *The modern State, the actual political reality, requires bases of a larger size than those represented by the Nations properly speaking. To be politically viable, the modern State must rest on a vast imperial union of allied Nations. The modern State is not truly a state as much as it is an empire(1).* This modern form of empire can no longer be a universal form like the one perfected by Rome whose fiction continued with Byzantium. Kojève saw in it at least three, issuing from the aftermath of the war. The American or Anglo Saxon empire, the Slavo-Sovietic empire and he proposed that Europe would make itself into a Latin empire.

It is in this real of three empires that different ways of living were traced out for the Sage, living the end of history which announced the general satisfaction with mass consumption and bourgeois comfort, terms employed by Kojève, but which could be replaced by the ideal production of a generalised middle class. We could not define that which is here named *relationship* more precisely than as a mode of enjoyment (jouir).

This *relationship* between Nations, which actually becomes a primordial political factor, is a concrete undeniable fact having nothing at all to do with the generally vague and uncertain ideas regarding race. The relationship between Nations is above and before all a relationship of language, of civilisation, of general mentality where one also can say- of climate. And this spiritual relationship is translated amongst other ways as identity of religion(2).* He therefore assigns a line of partition between the Anglo Saxon, Protestant world, which for him predicts the rapid inclusion of Germany within the ensemble, and the Orthodox Slavic world and the Catholicism of the Latin world. Kojève's Catholicism is particular and cannot be defined in its essentials by dogma or ideals. This is a mentality which knew how to keep its place in the Roman *OTIUM* *this mentality is characterised in that it has a specificity through this art of leisure which is the source of art in general, by the

aptitude of creating this sweetness of living which has nothing to do with material comfort,...which thus allows the transformation of simple bourgeois well-being to aristocratic softness and elevates it frequently even to joy, the pleasures which, in a different ambience would be vulgar pleasures. *Kojève here knowingly diverts, to the benefit of his own perspective, the protestant-capitalism unity established by Weber which the text cites in a generic fashion. He proposes a *pooling alliance* around a mode of enjoyment which can specify the bourgeois comfort, can bestow on it a form which it did not before possess. This repartition of Kojève leaves aside Asia, which he was nevertheless very well acquainted with, being at an early stage an eminent Sinologist. He later would situate China as a variant of Russian communism. It was during his voyage to Japan in 1959 that he was to recognise in the Japanese mode of enjoyment a completely original way which he would qualify as Snobism (3), being *a state of living within the function of totally formalised values, ie. empty of any human content in a historical sense (4).*

In 1945, he leaves the other two empires a probable advantage in the register of the work, he centers the particularity of the Latin empire on the perfection which it can bestow on repose.

Lacan adopts and criticises the Kojévian perspective on bureaucracies.

(To be continued)

translated by Rivka Warshawsky

(1) Kojève (A.), *Esquisse d'une doctrine de la politique française* (1945), in "La Règle du jeu", no. 1, mai 1990, Paris.

(2) "Ibid.", p.103.

(3) This notation announces the discovery of a Japanese mode of enjoyment opening the way moreover to a fourth empire. Dominique Auffret, in her excellent biography, follows Kojève affirming that it is not till after 59 that he gives consistence to this perspective of a non animality or uniformity of the end of history (A. Kojève, Grasset, 1990, p.341). Is it not since 1945 that the end of history leaves for him place for the different modes of enjoyment of mass consumption or bourgeois comfort? It is at least the perspective here proposed.

(4) Kojève (A.), "Introduction à la lecture de Hegel", Première édition 1947, Seconde Edition, Gallimard, 1968, p. 437. Here it concerns the additional note of 1968.