

Interpretation

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Kojève-Fessard Documents

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The three letters from Alexandre Kojève to Gaston Fessard and Kojève's "Review of Two Books by Gaston Fessard" were originally published as an appendix to *Gabriel Marcel—Gaston Fessard: Correspondance (1934–1971)*, presented and annotated by Henri de Lubac, Marie Gaugier and Michel Sales (Paris: Beauchesne, 1985), pp. 506–16. "Christianity and Communism" originally appeared as *Christianisme et communisme* in *Critique*, nos. 3–4 (1946), pp. 308–12. Gaston Fessard, "Deux interprètes de la phénoménologie de Hegel: Jean Hyppolite et Alexandre Kojève," appeared in *Études* (décembre, 1947), pp. 368–73 and reprinted in Gaston Fessard. *Hegel, le Christianisme et l'Histoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), pp. 275–79. I would like to thank Nina Ivanoff, Kojève's legatee, for permission to publish the Kojève material and to the editors of *Études* (14, rue d'Assas, 75006, Paris) and Presses Universitaires de France for permission to publish the Fessard article. I would also like to thank Michael S. Roth and Father Michael Sales, S.J., for their assistance. Paul Benoit provided many helpful suggestions.

THREE LETTERS FROM ALEXANDRE KOJÈVE TO GASTON FESSARD

1. Excerpt from a Letter from Kojevnikoff to Gaston Fessard, June 21, 1936.

. . . Certainly, I am not overly familiar with ancient paganism. But everything I know about it leads me to believe that it is impossible to recognize myself in the man those pagans described. It doesn't matter much—perhaps—that I do not believe in the gods of Olympus. But it does—I believe—matter a great deal that *my* atheism is not reduced to the negation of *their* existence. And therefore—which is particularly important on the plane where our discussion takes place—I do not believe in the *essential* difference between Master and Slave, between citizens and non-citizens, "Greek" and "Barbarian." Generally speaking, I do not believe that man is, that I myself am, determined once and for all—like any "other thing"—by my "innate" nature, i.e., by my place in the natural Cosmos, by my position in the City, for the simple reason that I do

not believe that I live in a Cosmos, [and] that there is no longer a City where one could really live. All of this leads me then to believe that I am not a pagan; not only because I do not *want* to be one, but also—and even above all—because it is humanly impossible for a European of the twentieth century and—I am firmly convinced of this—of any century to come.

Be that as it may, each time in your book (Gaston Fessard, *Pax Nostra: Examen de conscience internationale* [Paris: Grasset, 1936]. Translator's note.) Judeo-Christianity is opposed to paganism, I take the side of the former, without a moment's hesitation. Even in their theological, indeed mythological form, the Judeo-Christian ideas of "mortal sin," of "conversion," of absolute perfection ("be perfect as your Father is perfect"), seem to me nearer to a true anthropology than the notion of a "Platonic idea" of human being, than Aristotle's affirmation that man is not the most perfect being in the (natural) Cosmos. In short, I would like you to agree with me when I say that I am not a pagan. And I would like to obtain the same agreement on the other point, on the point of my "non-Judaism."

I mean by "Judaism" what—if I am not mistaken—you yourself mean, i.e., what a St. Paul had in mind in his Epistle to the Romans, for example. It is the anti-pagan Judaism, such as existed before the Christian era—such as continues to exist in the minds of certain Jews—outside of its "*Aufhebung*" in Christianity. It is above all else the "*Weltanschauung*" based on the idea of the "election" of the *people* of Israel, an idea which made a Halévy say that there is no general term to designate both Jew and Goy (that "Goy" being something essentially different than the "barbarian" of the pagans).

Well, that Judaism is as foreign to me as Greco-Roman paganism (although as "*aufgehoben*" in me as the latter). In any case, in parting company with Christianity, it is not to *that* Judaism that I fall back into: I deny Christ not because I deny the *incarnation* of Yahweh, but because I deny Yahweh himself. On other matters, the prohibitions of eating, circumcision, etc.—all that is for me only barbaric practices. The names of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are only insignificant names for me. And as for the fundamental idea of the "election" of a *people*, of the exclusive humanity of a race, I could never accept it. . . .

Vanves, June 19, 1939

2.

Dear Father,

Thank you for having thought of me again by sending me your last book (Gaston Fessard, *Épreuve de force* [Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1939]. Translator's note.). I have just finished it. I wouldn't say that I read it with *pleasure*, for the

feelings it raises are of a completely different sort. But I can say that reading it is *comforting*. Indeed, as long as books of this sort are written, published and read in France, all is not yet lost.

I do not need to tell you that I subscribe without reservation to the *political* aspect of your book:—you know that. As for its metaphysical “superstructure,” you also know that we don’t agree. However, it seems to me that your book realizes the very idea of the “extended hand” that you rejected in theory. As for me, I think that two lines moving in different directions can intersect at a precise point and I believe for us “Munich” is precisely such a point.

If you are staying in Paris the month of July, I would be very happy to meet with you (for the moment I’m too busy).

Thanks again, and, dear father, my respectful and profound sympathy.

Kojève

Vanves, June 26, 1956

3.

Dear Father,

Thank you very much for kindly sending me your last book (Gaston Fessard, *La dialectique des exercices spirituels de saint Ignace de Loyola, Volume 1: Liberté, Temps, Grâce* [Paris: Aubier, 1956]. Translator’s note.). I started reading it yesterday, it interests me greatly.

Having seen the annexed diagrams, I have to admit I’ve been beaten—badly!

Speaking seriously, your book comes at just the right time for me. As a matter of fact, I am now immersed (thanks to an illness! . . . me too, you see) in trinitarian theology. I have understood for a long time that that theology realizes the only progress ontology has made since Plato. But until recently I have underestimated the importance of the theology of the Holy Spirit. Certainly it has been treated as a poor relation by (nonheretical!) theologians. True, they nevertheless do say some very important things, although for the most part only *implicitly*, about it. Now I feel your book will explain many of these implications. For the “circular system”, is nonetheless—essentially—the Spirit (which proceeds from the Father AND the Son, of course, contrary to what the Eastern Fathers, who, in this matter, could never get beyond Plato-Plotinus, think).

Very cordially and respectfully yours,

Kojève

II. ALEXANDER KOJÈVE, *REVIEW OF TWO BOOKS BY G. FESSARD*²

G. Fessard. *Pax Nostra. Examen de conscience international*. Paris, Grasset, 1936, In-16, XX-464, p. 18 Frs.

G. Fessard. *La main tendue? Le dialogue catholique-communiste est-il possible?* Paris, Grasset, 1937. In-16, 247 p.

It is impossible to submit Father Fessard's last two books to an examination that is the least bit detailed without going beyond the limits of a book review. And yet this very sincere and at the same time extremely adept attempt to exploit for Catholicism the philosophic effort realized by Hegel and Marx and thus to facilitate for the "Hegelian" and the "Marxist"—which means in fact, "modern man" more or less conscious of himself—access to the Catholic faith and the Church—that attempt requires an in-depth criticism on the part of anyone who sees it in only a misunderstanding and a dissimulation of the actual situation.

Of course it is not up to me to discuss Father Fessard's ideas from the perspective of dogmatics: they *are* "orthodox" since they are *published*. I can only speak of them from the "Hegelian" and "Marxist," or, to come to the point, atheist perspective. For, as Father Fessard has seen and shown very well, it is in the *theism-atheism* problem that the center of gravity of the *philosophical* discussion of the questions raised in these books is situated.

What I object to in *Pax Nostra* is the fact that the central problem, instead of being discussed seriously, is presented as resolved. In transposing Hegel's historical schema, Father Fessard presents (Catholic) Christianity as the *synthesis* of the pagan thesis and Jewish *antithesis*, and infers from that that any attempt to "go beyond" Christianity in fact leads to a relapse into either the "pagan" attitude of subordination to Nature and to the empirical given in general, or the "Jewish" attitude of eternal and sterile negation. Now all of Hegel's effort, integrally accepted on this point by Marx, tends to prove that the pagan *thesis* and the Judeo-Christian (or "bourgeois") *antithesis* can and must be *aufgehoben*, i.e., done away with [*suprimées*] insofar as they are unilateral and "false" but conserved insofar as they are true and essential, in and by the post-Christian, or what means the same thing, postrevolutionary *synthesis*, which is essentially atheist and areligious. Father Fessard appeals to the fact that the "idea" or "ideal" of that *synthesis* announced by Marx and Hegel originates in—and implies—the "idea-ideal" revealed in and by Christianity—and he concludes that it is only a development of the Christian *synthesis*, which is essentially theist and religious. Now that reasoning, which is certainly *not* "dialectical," does not seem to me to be conclusive. For by starting from the principle that an idea which implies and presupposes another cannot "go beyond" it, one could just as well "reduce" to "paganism" or to "Judaism," or to the simple "sum" of both, Christianity itself, which, doubtless, results in denying, here too, that *creative* act of man which "dialectic" precisely wants to explain.

Certainly, if the Christian God exists, Father Fessard is right, and it is useless to attempt to go beyond Christianity. And the man who believes in God only has to ask himself if the “dialectic” still has a meaning for him. But Hegel and Marx, in developing their “dialectic” and in positing the historical schema which results from it, begin precisely with the impossibility for them and for “modern” man, of admitting that God’s existence. And all their effort has the aim of replacing in that *new* man by that “new” man, the God who has already been killed in them and by them.

To convince “modern” man of *Pax Nostra’s* historical schema, the existence of the God in whom he no longer believes must be *proven*, and proven by *other* arguments than the familiar ones which he no longer finds satisfactory. And that is what Father Fessard sets out to do in *La main tendue*.

We find two arguments here, but the first is far from new. It is the argument—and in my opinion, the only philosophically *discussable* argument—already found in Plato (cf. for example *Gorgias* 23:467 ff.) and which Father Fessard presents in the following terms: “Whoever says progress says *being better*. But the comparison of the *better* to the *less good* requires a reference to the *end* of progress or to *perfection*. When there is no end, no perfection, there is no possibility of discerning between the better and the less good and, consequently, no possibility of progress” (p. 122). That that way of seeing things really leads to theism is vouched for by Plato and the history of philosophy. But that same history of philosophy teaches us that things can be seen differently. According to Hegel, for example, to speak only of him, “progress” is brought about not by the Platonic-Aristotelian tendency towards a real and *given* good, which in fact means in the end—towards *the* Good or towards *God*, but by the *negation* of the given real. That negation is only determined by that “nonperfect” given and by the will to *not* accept it as *given*. As for the “better,” it is better simply because being the *negation* of the “less good”—it implies and presupposes it, without coinciding with it, and the “less good” is only less good because it is *deniable*— and *really denied* because it *gives way* to the “better” created by the same negation. According to that “Hegelian” conception, man—to take a “Socratic,” indeed, banal example—did not need to have the “idea” of central heating to build the first stove and to see that that stove is more valuable than a wood fire; similarly it is not necessary to have enjoyed “perfect health” and *know* what it is, to notice that a toothache is “less good” than a cold. And—to reply above all to Plato-Socrates in the *Gorgias*—man does not *always* get up to do something “good” or “better”; often he gets up just because he cannot or does not want to remain seated, whether because that position has become physically unbearable or “simply” boring.

In my opinion, Hegel’s “atheist” interpretation is at least as suggestive as Plato’s “theist” interpretation. And if one is content to reproduce the “Platonic” interpretation without wanting to or being able to add anything to it, it would perhaps also be worth while to reproduce the contrary interpretation—partic-

ularly when one is familiar with it. For when one *reasons*, does one not want to end up with a conscious and free assent, made with a full understanding of the issue?

But Father Fessard is not content with reproducing the “Platonic” reasoning. In his second argument he modifies it, modernizes it, even makes it very “modern,” since it is essentially existential. That second reasoning is as follows: “To be at the same time true and real, the process of history must have a *meaning* and consequently an end” (p. 161). In other words, in the end *God* must exist if human history and *my* place in it can have a *meaning*; and *I* must believe in *God* if that history and my place in it are to have meaning for *me*.

I believe that much can be granted to Father Fessard: If history (in its entirety) must have a *meaning*, recourse must be made not only to the God-Good of Plato, but also to the God-Mediator, to the God-Man of the Christians. Only, who says and who has proven that history *must* have a meaning—or, more exactly, that it actually has one? Certainly I, like every man, have *wished* it had one. But is that “desire” what Father Fessard wanted to *discuss*? And is it something that *can* be discussed rationally or philosophically?

It seems to me that Father Fessard addresses my *reason*. Now, in the first place, that reason of mine can, indirectly, force me to oppose my own “desire for meaning.” It can make me see that the history which already *has* a meaning, a meaning different from—and independent of—any that I impose on it here and now, is not *my* history, but rather the history of that *meaning* as such. I will then see that it is not me, but that “meaning” which has a *history*, its history—a history which I perhaps “realize,” but which I do not create. And, having seen that, I can see that if in accepting that consequence, perhaps I border on “heresy,” I certainly do not satisfy my pride, i.e., precisely the “desire” whose satisfaction is supposed to compensate, in the “New Man,” for the loss of advantages which the “meaning” of the “Christian synthesis” and its “true and real” history offered him. Reason can therefore reveal that there is within me a “desire” which—enlightened by reason—is opposed to the “desire for meaning,” by not accepting what reason reveals as the necessary conditions for the satisfaction of the latter. And if Father Fessard, by reasoning, appeals to one of those “desires,” how can he prevent Hegel and Marx from reasoning by appealing to the other?

But—and this is more important—it is not up to reason to *choose* between the two desires, to decide *for* or *against* the unreasonable restlessness of pride or the circumspect tranquility of humility; nor to proclaim as true what is supposed to make the man who is the partisan of one of these “desires” *happy*. Reason, to possess man, does not need to promote his happiness nor presuppose him unhappy; unhappy—or blessed, it will be equally accessible to him. And that is why, incidentally, philosophy can, far better than religion, support men’s efforts to make themselves happy in their own fashion by believing they can do without all philosophy or religion. It doesn’t matter much to reason that

the man in whom—and for whom—historical existence no longer has “meaning” can or can not be *happy*. Generally, it is not up to reason—at least “philosophical” reason—to work in the pay of man’s desires. It is there only to show him *what* he is and where he *is*. Now, has Father Fessard really shown to man by his reason that—for *him*—history *really* has a meaning?

I don’t think so. Father Fessard has simply noted the psychological fact that man when he wants to think himself *happy*, blessed, thinks himself—even when his name is Hegel or Marx—as participating in a “history” which has a definitive and “absolute” “meaning.” And he has perhaps shown that man must believe in a God-Man if he wants to believe in such a meaning in *history*. In other words, he has at the very most shown that the idea of a (definitive and “absolute”) goal of history—and consequently my action within it—necessarily implies, even for a Hegel or a Marx, a more or less Judeo-Christian myth. And he can, I believe, be granted that. But the misfortune is that a myth which *knows* itself to be a myth is no longer a “myth,” but more or less a “fable,” conventional or not. And the misfortune of “modern” man that Hegel and Marx had in view, having *been* more or less modern men themselves, is due precisely to the aptitude for *recognizing* myths as such, and consequently in the incapacity of producing and conserving them as myths which are *believed*. To show to *that* man, by an “existential” interpretation, that Christianity is a requirement of a desire inherent in human nature which it alone can satisfy—is to affirm or awaken in him the suspicion that Christianity, even in its “Hegelian” or “Marxist” transposition, is only a *myth*, or an “ideology,” fundamentally sexual, social or something else. Generally, it is imprudent to repair something with a tool which was forged—perhaps without its author’s knowledge—only for its destruction. In addition, the type of analyses Father Fessard has undertaken could easily have the effect of making “modern” man still less “Christian” than orthodox “Hegelians” and “Marxists.”

As for his interpretation of the hand extended by the Communist atheist to the believing Catholic, I am in perfect agreement with what seems to be the substance of Father Fessard’s thought. Between atheist and theist the hand cannot be offered from equal to equal. If the one extends his hand to the other—and does it without ulterior motives, as Father Fessard would want—he extends it in the manner the master extends his hand to the student, in order to help him better understand the world in which he lives and to see himself more clearly. And, moreover, to take Plato’s word for it (who on this point, I think, can serve as an authority), a *dialogue* in the strong and proper sense of the term can only take place under those conditions.

The question then is to know which of the two *must* play the role of the master here. And I would reply as the good “Hegelian” that I am: the one who *can* play it, the one who will succeed in *imposing* himself as “master,” whether by the superiority of his reasoning, or by extra-rational reasons, which are reduced in the end to the success of his actions. That is why I started by saying

that Father Fessard's books demanded an in-depth critique on the part of those who see in his truth only a—very beautiful—myth.

As for the “extra-rational reasons,” there is certainly no question of *discussing* them here. I would like to finish, however, by saying a few words about them.

Father Fessard tells us that Christianity, at least Catholicism, does not in the least exclude the ideal of socialist happiness, simply adding to it some supplementary attractions which are, moreover, essential. Let's admit that. He adds that the ideal can be formed only on the basis of the Christian anthropology which—as such, and from the beginning of its appearance—is coupled with an appropriate theology whose rudiments are found in the Bible and in the Gospels. And, on that point, he is certainly right. Finally, he tells us it is only in and by—or at the very least with the participation of the Church that that idea can one day be effectively and fully *realized*. Let's suppose as much. But then how can one explain that all the approximations of that realization, all the “forty-hour work weeks” realized successively in the course of history, have generally been realized thanks to men who, far from being docile sons of the Church, preferred for the most part to conserve the Christian *anthropology* and all its practical consequences, while rejecting more or less completely the *theology* the Church attaches to it? And how do we understand that a “socialist party” which at the same time calls itself “Christian”—and which *is* Christian, since it remains recognized as such by the Church—tends almost always to act, when it can, as the party of that name recently acted in Austria?

I am content to pose these *questions*. And I know that in themselves they are not yet *objections* to what Father Fessard says. But—and this is where I would like to finish—must these questions not be answered *before* one claims the role of master, called to explain to “Marxists” how they must set about realizing their master's idea?

III. ALEXANDRE KOJÈVE, *CHRISTIANITY AND COMMUNISM*

Gaston Fessard, *France, prends garde de perdre ta liberté!* Éd. du témoignage Chrétiens, 1946, 318 pages.

This book is a Catholic critique directed against Communism and the French Communist Party. It can be divided in two parts which are unequal in size—and value. One part is a critical analysis of the metaphysical content of Communist doctrine. That content is reduced by M. Fessard first to Marx's, then to Hegel's dialectic. This part displays as it were a knowledge and understanding that is never found among the adherents of the criticized doctrine; if he had wanted, the author would certainly have been, by far, the best Marxist theoretician in France. The other part, comprising nine-tenths of the book, is what is called “a piece of anticommunist propaganda,” with all the characteristics of the genre.

The part of the book which is not propaganda would doubtless deserve a detailed discussion, but such a discussion would lead us too far. Moreover, a response to M. Fessard's outlook is implicitly contained in a study to appear in this journal. (Alexandre Kojève, "*Hegel, Marx et le Christianisme*" (critique of Henri Niel's *De la médiation dans la philosophie de Hegel*, Critique 3-4, pp. 339-65. Kojève's note. English translation by Hilail Gildin in *Interpretation* 1, no. 1 (1970), 21-42.) I will be content therefore to indicate here that any attempt to exploit for Christianity's benefit the Hegelian discovery of the dialectic necessarily encounters the fact that dialectic is bound up with finitude, which is revealed to man under the aspect of death. To the extent that Christians accept the idea of the *death* of God (i.e., his humanity, his historicity), they can have the impression of being able to use the Hegelian dialectical descriptions and to take advantage of their indisputable explanatory value. But they implicitly deny all dialectic (i.e., the decisive, definitive, and irreducible value of historical action) as soon as they admit the *resurrection*. Now to deny the resurrection of a God who dies is to deny his divinity as such. For if, by an abuse of language, it is still possible to call "God" a being whose existence is a *becoming*, it is obvious that that term does not apply to a being who dies in the proper sense of that term. The notion of a Christian or theological dialectic is a contradiction in itself, and that contradiction is not "dialectical": it is simply a lack of rigorous thinking.

As a work of propaganda, M. Fessard's book would require, of course, a counter book of the same order, which would have the goal of "neutralizing" it. It would have to respond point by point, trying to remove from M. Fessard's criticisms—even the pertinent ones—their persuasive value. Here, within the framework of an "objective" study, I must be content with making a few general remarks.

I would like to show at the outset that it is very much a work of propaganda, in the sense that the assumed effect of the argument on the reader is more important than the adequation of the argument with reality. Thus, after having shown in a truly convincing fashion that Communist *doctrine* is fundamentally atheist, M. Fessard does not leave it at that. For a believer, that is sufficient to reveal the irreparably erroneous character of a doctrine, and therefore the pernicious nature of every action or manifestation which follows from it. But M. Fessard probably presumes, and quite rightly, that for modern man, even if he believes he is a believer, the crime of atheism no longer provokes the horror that it should if it really were a crime and which it in actual fact provoked for centuries. Also it is not so much as atheists that he denounces the Communists to his fellow citizens; but as bad Frenchmen and wicked and dangerous people in general who can jeopardize the tranquility and personal security (called on this occasion "freedom"—in the singular or plural) of fathers of families, of unionized or nonunionized workers, etc. . . . and—last but not least—of intellectuals of all types.

This denunciation is made, moreover, in conformity with the proven and classic methods of good works of propaganda. One says the truth, nothing but the truth, but not the whole truth. Thus, in passing off an isolated aspect of reality for an adequate description of that reality, one disfigures it profoundly without having “invented” anything.

With a number of (pertinent) arguments and (authentic) documents to support him, M. Fessard demonstrates, for example, that the Communists are bad Frenchmen because they would subordinate French politics to Soviet politics (which he has the tendency to identify, this time without very convincing arguments, with Russian or Slavic politics). But he forgets to mention that exactly the same reproach can be made by his Communist adversaries. For what is actually opposed, and what can reasonably be opposed to Communist politics is not an authentically and exclusively French politics (whose anachronistic character is apparent to anyone as soon as they have tried to apply it). To the invitation to follow the tracks of the USSR one only opposes in fact the counsel to sail in the Anglo-Saxon wake. And one is inspired, in both cases, not by patriotic motives, but by the desire (admitted or not) of either radically transforming or maintaining in its essentials a given social and economic order. Thus M. Fessard’s analysis would come closer to reality, but only by becoming infinitely less effective from the perspective which concerns him, if he had said what in his capacity as a well-informed Hegelian he cannot ignore, namely that in our age of Empires a “national” or nationalist politics is no longer possible, since nations themselves have ceased to exist politically (i.e., militarily) as isolated entities.

This is why moreover M. Fessard resorts to the supplementary argument of “freedom.” If it were not a work of propaganda, one would be surprised that its Catholic author is so keen on nationalism and liberalism. For a Catholic must know that the essential Christian values are, if not “internationalist,” at least inter- or trans-national and that they could be realized only in circumstances of which the least that can be said is that the impediments to freedom of conduct and expression were not entirely suppressed. But it is natural and legitimate, if one wants to convince people, to highlight suspect or secondary values, if they are regarded as primordial by those being addressed, even if their outlook is not derived from the authentic source of all truth.

However, and this again is natural and legitimate, the very person of the author can impede the effect of his propaganda. Without a doubt, everyone is aware that many modern Catholics are sincerely “liberals.” And one could even explain it as one can explain liberalism in general,³ by a certain lack of faith, or more exactly by the fact that Catholics can no longer accept integrally and without reservation all the traditional verbal expressions of their belief. But even if they actually go so far as renouncing, more or less openly, certain antiliberal practices from the glorious past of their Church (which it would, nevertheless, be easy and even necessary to justify), nothing has yet proved

that they are capable of establishing and maintaining liberalism if hostile, external forces did not require them to do so. It is not surprising then, since we are talking about freedom, if others think that, despite their numerous and perhaps overly lengthy detours, the Communists might one day arrive at the final destination that Catholics would never reach, if—by some miracle—they were left alone.

In a work of propaganda, it is perfectly legitimate to make use of certain devices, while at the same time reproaching one's adversaries for using them. While simplifying to the extreme the nascent Communist reality, M. Fessard therefore has the right to reproach Communist polemicists with disfiguring Catholic reality: they do not take into account the possibilities that reality implies, but which have not yet been able to emerge during the course of what has been, after all, a rather long development. Without a doubt in a work of propaganda one would have the right to reproach him in the same manner. But in an objective study we must be content with noting the characteristics which allow us to classify as propaganda a book by an author who has elsewhere published some remarkable works of a very different genre.

Those same features are found everywhere and in all ages. M. Fessard's book resembles not only the writings of his co-religionists, but also those of his Communist adversaries. Anti-Communist Catholic literature thus reveals an undeniable and pleasing kinship with the anti-Catholic literature of the Enlightenment. In both cases, one relentlessly collects the greatest possible number of absurd or appalling features, immediately verifiable and accessible to everyone, features that belong to the surface and only meagerly contribute to characterizing the profound essence of the phenomenon. Thus works of propaganda are necessarily and, as it were, by definition, superficial; they should not be used to judge others or the realities that they have in view.

IV. GASTON FESSARD, *TWO INTERPRETERS OF HEGEL'S PHENOMENOLOGY: JEAN HYPOLITE AND ALEXANDRE KOJÈVE*

Hegel is decidedly the toast of France. Last year, Father Niel published a book on *Mediation in Hegel's Philosophy*, which we said, in these pages (*Etudes*, September 1946, p. 292. Fessard's note.), constitutes a good general introduction to the study of that author. He now provides us with a translation of Hegel's *Lectures on the Proofs of God's Existence* (translation with an Introduction and notes by Henri Niel [Paris: Aubier, 1947]. Fessard's note.) which has arrived at just the right moment. For two works, one by J. Hyppolite, the other by A. Kojève, have recently resurrected the problem of Hegel's atheism or theism, raising at the same time the question of the meaning of the whole of his philosophy. Dedicated to the elucidation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, these two books are essential for the reader who has already become acquainted

with the whole of the Hegelian *oeuvre* by Father Niel, but for very different reasons, which we must make more precise.

When he published his translation of the *Phenomenology* in 1939 and 1941, M. Hyppolite announced that he was preparing a general commentary on that work which already contains in germ the whole of the Hegelian system. The quality of that translation, which we praised at the time it came out (*Construire*, VIII, p. 222. Fessard's note.), made all Hegelians impatiently await its appearance. They have not been disappointed, first by attending the brilliant defense where it was presented as a doctoral thesis, then by immersing themselves in the six hundred pages of *Genesis and Structure of the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Paris: Aubier, 1947. Fessard's note.). M. Hyppolite declared to his examiners that it was his intention to write a "good scholarly work." By adding the word "very" to *good*, both its excellence and its limits are qualified more exactly. At the price of some twenty years labor, M. Hyppolite penetrated the mysteries of one of the most difficult texts in the history of philosophy. By the clarity, probity, and rigor of his thought, his book is recommended from now on to anyone wanting to tackle Hegel directly. Until now, the *Phenomenology* stood at the threshold of the system as an almost inaccessible peak, approachable only to those rare mountaineers having at their disposal unusual lung capacity and even more exceptional leisure time. Now by his translation and thesis, M. Hyppolite has forged, if not a highway—dialectical terrain goes against that and contains, we believe, too many sharp surprises for anyone who wants to cross it by car—at least a mule trail, well marked with road signs which make climbing it at least ten times easier, in terms of both strength and time, for the mountaineer. M. Hyppolite cannot be praised or thanked enough for his achievement. Given the intrinsic value of Hegel's philosophy and the role which his dialectic plays at the center of the most serious problems of our time, it must be hoped that the path forged will invite numerous philosophers and even—if not more so—theologians to climb it.

In truth, once they arrive at the summit or perhaps already en route, either group might feel a bit disappointed. For despite or rather even because of its excellence, *Genesis and Structure of the Phenomenology* has its limits: those of a "scholarly work." How does the summit of absolute knowledge link up with those in the *Logic* or the *Encyclopedia*? What exactly is the nature of Time that Hegel identifies with the Concept? To what extent does he succeed, as he claims, in "comprehending history"? Speculative mysticism or atheist humanism, what is, in the last analysis, Hegel's fundamental thought and its value? On all these questions, M. Hyppolite is content to gather the opposed elements. But since he is afraid of influencing his reader, he leaves him every time before a question mark. Scrupulous professor, impartial historian, he refuses to choose between left and right Hegelians and leaves the decision up to us.

The deficiencies, but also the merits, of a such an approach are acutely felt after encountering the *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel (Lectures on the*

"*Phenomenology of Spirit*," given from 1933 to 1939 at L'Ecole des hautes Études, collected and edited by Raymond Queneau, Paris: Gallimard, 1947. Fessard's note.). For M. Kojève's work, also an explanation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is the complete antithesis of a "good scholarly work": First of all by its presentation, where the disparate nature of the material gathered, the confusion of the lecture form, hardly favors the understanding of a text which is, moreover, teeming with repetitions and obscurities and does not even exclude certain mistakes. But above all, it is by its author's resolute option in favor of a Hegel who is perfectly and consciously an atheist. The extreme intelligence and the rigorous logic with which M. Kojève defends his point of view will quickly make one forget the drawbacks in presentation, however. The most difficult texts of the *Phenomenology*, for example on the identity of Time and the Concept, that M. Hyppolite cited without prejudging their ultimate meaning are here taken as the center of the entire interpretation and are clarified by the light they shed on the whole. Basing himself on Husserl and even more on Heidegger, M. Kojève makes the Master-Slave dialectic the essential part of the entire *Phenomenology*, and, after having explained that man's radical finitude alone allows us to understand history, he does not hesitate to see in Hegel someone who consciously "identified himself with Christ," but in order to reveal to humanity, along with the inanity of Christianity, the inexorable nothingness to which it is condemned.

In that perspective, where Hegel becomes not only a Feurbachian and Marxist, but also a Heideggerian before the fact, it is undeniable that a large part of the *Phenomenology* and above all the influence of Hegelianism are explained and clarified far better than they ever have been before. Moreover, M. Kojève raises the most passionate problems concerning the relations between history and truth.

Yet, all these merits are reversed when they are contrasted with the value of the impartial reserve to which M. Hyppolite confines himself. Let's say nothing about the fundamental absurdities M. Kojève is led to by his intrepid logic, bringing Hegel and Marxism along with him. The Communist "intellectuals," who could benefit so much from this book, will have to take a stand vis-a-vis the truths it establishes, and it will be very interesting to see their reaction in this regard.⁴ But will he be forgiven the notes on pages 388 and 435, where the inhumanity of the "end of history" they wish for is revealed?⁵ Let's leave Marxism aside and stay at the level of Hegel interpretation. At what cost can M. Kojève sustain his thesis of a consciously atheist Hegel convinced of man's radical finitude? At the price of qualifying Hegel's monism as a prejudice (p. 38)! On the condition of completely opposing natural and historical time in Hegel! On condition of discounting his vitalism, of completely ignoring the *Philosophy of Nature* and even ignoring the same elements which are found in the *Phenomenology*. The "embarrassing part" of Hegelianism, it is said. I wish it were so; but things are not so simple. After the treatment he received from

M. Kojève, Hegel would have doubtless felt he was being mutilated. Let's not talk about atheism: we are content to refer to the *Proofs of God's Existence*, translated by Father Niel and to the reaction of the Marxists! As for the dialectic, which, according to M. Kojève is only possible on the hypothesis of the finitude of man, since Hegel says: "The essence of every *finite* being is to abolish itself . . .," is it necessary to recall that *abolish* (*aufheben*) also means in Hegel's language to *conserve* and *transcend*? So that that citation says rather the complete opposite of M. Kojève's interpretation, Hegel moreover adding in twenty different places: "It is the very nature of the finite to go beyond itself, to deny its negation and become infinite . . ." (*Logik*, ed. Lasson, I, p. 126. Fessard's note.)

We hope to return on another occasion and at greater length to a book and to ideas which merit much more than such a summary discussion. For both the book and the ideas are called to exert a profound influence. Or rather they exert it now and are already spread around in more than one book or review. For don't forget: the *Lectures* which make up this book were given before the war, over a period of five years. Before a very limited audience, it is true, but one met there besides Raymond Queneau, their present editor, A. Koyré, E. Weill, Raymond Aron, Georges Bataille, P. Klossowsky, Georges Polin, Marjolin, M. Merleau-Ponty, Lacan, without mentioning some others who were less diligent, such as André Breton. It would be sufficient to go back to the books, theses, review and journal articles written by the names just cited, to recognize to what an extent the authors have been, in diverse ways, influenced by the lectures heard at the Hautes Etudes. Having had the advantage of being one of M. Kojève's faithful listeners, we know what can be gained from a dialogue with such rigorous thinking. It is why we do not hesitate to recommend his book strongly to believing philosophers and especially to theologians who are preoccupied with the relations of truth and history. Approaching it, after having studied M. Hyppolite's, they will see in what terms a demanding mind poses problems today and will quickly understand that the sole recourse to the temporality of the truth is not enough to resolve that problem; moreover, it does not, to tell the truth, even touch upon the essential point. They will realize, then, to what an extent the Master-Slave dialectic is a necessary and effective instrument for "understanding history"; after which certain among them will be less astonished that Marxism had, by a simple inversion of that dialectic, engendered Nazism and that the parallels of Communism and Nazism, and not the pseudo-opposition of Communism and Capitalism,⁶ must be recognized as the solid point of departure for anyone who wishes to steer himself according to the "meaning of history." And if they do not want to despair of the world and of man, they will then be invited to seek what is truly the source of that famous dialectic, and to ask if there are not other dialectics, anterior and superior, which are as, or even more, necessary for understanding history and illuminating its meaning. Among them, how will they not quickly discover that the

Pauline dialectic of Pagan and Jew has a completely different value to lead man to “identify himself with Christ”? In short, after having courageously attended M. Kojève’s school, they will be, as we are, convinced that Marxism and Hegelianism, interpreted by the most intelligent of atheists, will not only be offered to a critique which easily reveals their fundamental errors, but will also open for them the most magnificent way to restoring a full actuality to both the historic and eternal truths of Christianity.

NOTES

1. The German words *Aufhebung* and *aufgehaben* in Hegel involve a threefold movement whereby an object is negated, conserved and elevated. (Translator’s note.)

2. This review was originally intended to be published in *Recherches philosophiques*. After the demise of that journal, the review was entrusted by Kojève to Fessard. Kojève also gave Fessard permission to publish it along with a response if the occasion ever arose. With the advent of the Second World War publication became impossible, and the review remained unpublished until 1985. (Translator’s note.)

3. On this subject see the writings of Pierre Bayle or Anatole France’s *Puits de Sainte-Claire*. (Kojève’s note.)

4. In an article entitled “Was Hegel a Marxist?”, signed A.A., the *Revue internationale*, no. 12, January 1947, already strongly reacted against M. Kojève’s “neo or pseudo-marxist existential” interpretation of Hegel. “If it is true that Hegel was already a ‘Marxist,’ all the criticisms directed against Hegel by Marx lose their meaning.” Nothing is more correct. M. Kojève should also expect that, like A.A., the Marxists, to preserve Marx’s originality, will become ardent defenders of Hegel’s “theism,” much more ardent than a Catholic philosopher will need to be. Nothing surprising in this contrast. It is always the “punishment of the dialectic,” which as Engels states crushes those who scorn it because they ignore it. (Fessard’s note.)

5. “The end of history is the *death* of Man properly speaking. After that death there remains: 1. living bodies having a human form but deprived of spirit, that is to say of time or creative power; 2. a Spirit which empirically exists, in the form of an inorganic, nonliving reality, as a Book which, not being animal life, no longer has anything to do with time” (p. 388). And on p. 431 M. Kojève tells us that in the Classless Society, where “Man remains alive in *harmony* with Nature,” *Philosophy* will have disappeared—which is logical since there is no longer a creative Spirit—but that “the rest can be preserved indefinitely: art, love, play, etc.; in short, everything that makes Man *happy*.” What could love and art be for beings deprived of spirit, not only in Hegel’s view, but in themselves, if not the art of a bee or the love of an ape. . . ? For having, in the pulpit of Notre Dame, spoken of Communist man as an “animal barely superior to the gorilla or chimpanzee,” Father Panici found himself called a “slanderer” by R. Garaudy. He is well avenged by M. Kojève! But the latter must expect not only the objections of the “Trotskyites” of the *Revue internationale*, but also the anathemas of the “orthodox thinkers” of *Pensée*, to say nothing of Pravda’s “condemnations.” (Fessard’s note.)

6. Let’s recall that capitalism is in no way a *Weltanschauung* and that consequently it is vain to try to find between it and Communism a dialectic analogous to that between Communism and Nazism. That reminder is necessary since there are still Christians who justify entering the Communist party, or at least echoing its propaganda and glorifying its ideal, by thinking it is the mortal enemy of capitalism, alone capable of defeating it. Once that root of atheism is cut, Marxist man will find himself Christian again—an illusion which is derived from a true fact but interprets it badly. For it is true that while capitalism, because of its injustices, leads to Communism, it does not produce it, precisely because it is not an ideology. The true origin of Marxism is rather liberalism and its revolutionary ideal, which having freed man and society from Christianity, has been incapable of bridling the excesses of the appetite for gain and the will to power. So that little by

little, a capitalist “state of things” is born, against which Marxism rebelled and which continues to nourish Communism. But Communism, inheritor of revolutionary anti-Christianity, which developed into systematic atheism, is much less capable of suppressing capitalism than of aggravating to the extreme the exploitation of man by man. It could only succeed and, in actuality, succeeded only by “generalizing” as Marx said, “the relationship of private property,” and creating a state capitalism which being necessarily national, changes into imperialism. “Negation of personality, of culture, of civilization,” such are, according to Marx himself, the signs by which “coarse communism” can be recognized (*Oeuvres philosophiques*, trans. Molitor, vol. VI, pp. 20–21). To those who do not close their eyes to reality, it is enough to denounce the falsehood of the Marxist ideal and Communist propaganda, even when it evokes the claimed effectiveness of its dialectic against capitalism. (Fessard’s note.)