

Mikhail Lifshits and the fate of Hegelianism in the 20th century

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Abstract In his essay “*Das literarische Erbe Hegels*” (“The fate of Hegel’s literary legacy”, 1931) Lifshits addressed the fate of Hegelianism in the first third of the 20th century. He observed a struggle surrounding Hegel’s heritage between Marxism on the one hand, and Neo-Hegelianism or „the Hegel renaissance“ on the other hand and came to the conclusion that the only legitimate Hegel heir is—Marxism. According to Lifshits, Neo-Hegelianism exploits the “Hegelian state” to justify the modern power state by illegitimately shifting the meaning of the Hegelian concept of the state. Thanks to Kojève’s philosophy, a diffuse yet profound Neo-Hegelian influence continues to have an impact on modern thinking, which gives cause in this essay to examine Lifshits’ verdict on the illegitimacy of the Neo-Hegelian Hegel heritage by confronting his argumentation with Kojève’s Neo-Hegelian concept. So, this essay will update Lifshits’ perspective on the fate of Hegelianism and broaden it beyond the horizon that was available to Lifshits.

Keywords Marxism · Hegel renaissance · Neo-Hegelianism · Kojève · Bourgeois · Citizen (citoyen) · Hegelian concept of the state · Modern power state

Lifshits addressed Hegel time and again throughout his life; and his was an interest of many facets. It ranged from addressing Hegel’s theoretical philosophy—in particular questions concerning *truth* and the *idea*—to working on Hegel’s philosophy of art. I am concerned with another aspect of this engagement with Hegel, viz., Lifshits’ view of the fate of Hegelianism in the first third of the 20th century, considered from today’s vantage point.

Lifshits was an observer and participant in a *struggle surrounding Hegel*; a struggle which became the subject of Lifshits’ essay ‘Das literarische Erbe Hegels’

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(“The fate of Hegel’s literary legacy”), written in 1931 (Lifschitz 1988). In this struggle, Lifshits takes sides and comes to a conclusion which at first appears trivial since it is what would be expected from a Soviet Marxist author, namely that Hegel’s *only legitimate heir is the proletariat*—that is to say, Marxism or the revolutionary wing of the labor movement. Less trivial, however, is how Lifshits justifies the legitimacy of a Hegel heritage by referring to very specific aspects of Hegelian philosophy that are still of interest today. To come right to the point, these aspects are related to the Hegelian concept of the state.

The struggle surrounding Hegel which Lifshits addresses took place during a German Hegel renaissance that firmly opposed the Marxist reception of Hegel. This Hegel renaissance picked up on the impulses of a renewed focus on Hegel known as “Neo-Hegelianism”, which began in Germany around 1900 and then spread to other European countries, and it had a profound impact on thinking: for example, the influence it had on German sociology¹ of the time is considerable; an influence that has its origins in the break of German Neo-Hegelianism with the “Absolute Spirit”. With this break, the focus moved to the “Objective Spirit” and “estrangement” became firmly established. Hegel’s understanding of estrangement is the separation of the subject as self-consciousness and the object as the outer world. It is only by means of religious reconciliation with reality which comprehends this philosophy—in the Absolute Spirit—that sublation of this separation is possible. If reconciliation and comprehension do not occur, “separation” persists and estrangement can be declared as the human “normal state” in the modern age.² Yet from a genuine *philosophical* standpoint, what remained of this Neo-Hegelianism following its time of origin and blossoming during the first third of the 20th century? While German Neo-Hegelianism practiced philosophical abstinence due to a critical (Neo-Kantian) view of metaphysics, the Russian-French philosopher Alexandre Kojève was a Neo-Hegelian who not only presented an original and refreshing interpretation of the Hegelian Philosophy of Spirit (during the famous lectures he held in Paris from 1933 to 1939), but also was able to provide productive stimuli for significant philosophical discourses beyond the limits of a direct interest in Hegel.

Kojève thus inspired various changes in recent intellectual history, including the run-up to French Postmodernism (Bataille³) and the anti-positivist turning point in psychoanalysis (Lacan⁴). He conveyed through an exchange of ideas⁵ with the father of American Neo-Conservatism Leo Strauss the last great legitimating ideology; one that is still in effect today, despite frequent critique by opponents within his own camp, namely that of American Imperialism (Fukuyama 1992).⁶ All

¹ As with Hans Freyer (See: Freyer 1930). Freyer as well as his pupils Arnold Gehlen and Helmut Schelsky, who were associated with the right-wing intellectual milieu, influenced the development of sociology in post-war West Germany.

² As in: Freyer 1955.

³ Agamben describes the theoretical relationship between Kojève and Bataille in: Agamben 2004.

⁴ For more see: Roudinesco 1993.

⁵ Which is reflected in Kojève’s critique (Kojève 1950) of the book by Leo Strauss (Strauss 1948).

⁶ Francis Fukuyama was a student of Allan Bloom who studied under Strauss.

of these changes, as varied as they might have been, share the formal commonality that in their respective fields, they set the course for further developments.

Neo-Hegelian thought plays a role in contemporary discourses that, though not always explicitly, have recourse to Hegel. This diffuse yet profound Neo-Hegelian influence continues to have an effect today and gives cause in this essay *to examine Lifshits' verdict on the illegitimacy of the Neo-Hegelian Hegel heritage by confronting his argumentation with Kojève's Neo-Hegelian concept*. I intend, in this essay to update Lifshits' perspective on the fate of Hegelianism during the first third of the 20th century (as far as it is related to the aspect mentioned above) and broaden it beyond the horizon then available to Lifshits. The question is therefore whether or not the Neo-Hegelian—more specifically: the Kojèvien—Hegel heritage is legitimate.

In what follows I will first present and then criticize Lifshits' discussion about the illegitimacy of the Neo-Hegelian Hegel heritage which he contrasts with what he considers to be the legitimate Soviet Marxist Hegel heritage. (I) This presentation will then be applied to Kojève's Neo-Hegelianism in order to answer the question whether or not Kojève is a “legitimate” Hegel heir. (II)

I

Lifshits about the illegitimacy of the Neo-Hegelian Hegel heritage

In his essay mentioned above, Lifshits first outlines the background of the Hegel renaissance of his time. Hegel, states Lifshits, presented the contradictions of civil (bourgeois) society and tried to solve them in an idealistic state cult. This did not please the German Liberals (Karl v. Rotteck, Karl Theodor Welcker)—they protested in the name of individualism, freedom and humanism against the “cruelty” of Hegelian progress. During the emerging era in the wake of the defeat of the 1848 Revolution, Rudolf Haym declared that Hegel, whom he accused of state glorification and even deification, was “finished”. In the subsequent 50 years, it was only Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels who maintained Hegel's best traditions. They had even come into conflict with Wilhelm Liebknecht who, in true liberal style, stigmatized Hegel as the discoverer and glorifier of the Prussian idea of the state, as a “Prussian”; a judgment which was met with fierce resistance from Marx and Engels. Yet despite their objections, the liberal assessment of Hegel took hold in Social Democratic literature. The Reformists—specifically Eduard Bernstein—preferred Kant's teachings of endless progress to an unattainable goal.

Now (1931), states Lifshits, the tide has turned. Liberalism is no longer the dominant ideology. Post-war society has lost its faith in endless progress and in formal democracy; Neo-Kantianism is suffering a defeat. The search for a new metaphysics has become fashionable and Hegel has been commemorated by both the bourgeoisie and in Social Democratic circles: On the occasion of his 100th birthday, the Social Democratic Prussian Cultural Minister Adolf Grimme declares Hegel to be a living presence. A philosophical neoclassicism goes hand in hand with a Hegel renaissance and a resurgence of Neo-Hegelianism.

What, asks Lifshits, is the meaning of this pendulum swing in the history of Neo-Hegelianism? The new era of Imperialism, he states, is distinguished by a quest for dominance instead of freedom and this marks the end of old Liberalism. The sought for “dominance” is that of an oligarchy that exploits the masses’ disenchantment with bourgeois democracy in its own interest; disenchantment which manifests itself in anti-democratic and anti-liberal resentment. According to Lifshits, elements of an anti-democratic and anti-liberal contemporary ideology transit seamlessly into fascism. These elements are also accompanied by both a bourgeois and Social Democratic critique of Manchester Liberalism from the standpoint of “state capitalism adorned with socialist rhetoric”. Active state intervention in economic life now seems desirable, while protecting private life from state intervention seems to no longer be necessary. Hegel becomes relevant once again as the dogmatist of the power of the universal over the individual and of the power of the state over private life.

This “state capitalism adorned with socialist rhetoric” merits a more detailed examination. Wording in which “rhetoric” plays a prominent role often represents a makeshift solution on Lifshits’ part. This term obscures what Lifshits is not able to articulate clearly or explain at that particular point. A circumstance which seems in this case difficult for Lifshits to explain is a similarity established during the Age of Imperialism: the similarity between bourgeois and Reformist Socialist (Social Democratic) ideologies on the one hand and in turn their similarity, which he leaves unmentioned, to the Revolutionary Socialist (communist or Soviet) ideology on the other hand. The latter manifests itself in what Lifshits calls “rhetorical” justification of state capitalism (which, as Lifshits leaves out, was called “socialism” in the Soviet Union), that of a powerful state (*Machtstaat*) and the “power of the universal”. Lifshits attempts to identify, beneath this superficial similarity, essential differences between revolutionary Socialism-Marxism on the one hand and reformist Socialism and bourgeois ideology on the other. For him, the ideological watershed lies, in this essay at least, among the different references to Hegel by means of which he distinguishes the legitimate from the illegitimate heirs of Hegel.

Illegitimate heirs are for Lifshits the contemporary bourgeois and Social Democratic ideologies that, he claims look back to Hegel’s critique of Liberalism (one influenced by the resonating impression that terror had left behind) resulting in his idealization of a state superior to all individual interests. According to Lifshits, both pick up this element and distort it: Hegel’s state cult (*Staatskult*) had nothing to do with contemporary social demagogy. The contemporary idea of a modern power state, writes Lifshits, is instead the fruit of a *regressive metamorphosis* of the state as it had been presented in the Hegelian Philosophy of Right. Neo-Hegelianism exploits the “Hegelian state” to legitimize the modern power state. In the protocols from the first Hegel Congress (Wigersma 1931) to which Lifshits referred in his essay, he finds a critique of individualism based on Hegel as well as arguments made for the primacy of the state over private interests. At first, these arguments bring Hegel, Robespierre and Bonaparte to mind. Yet according to Lifshits, they have a completely different meaning for the Neo-Hegelians. It is exactly this shift in meaning that is “illegitimate” according to Lifshits.

What constitutes this illegitimate shift in meaning? To answer this question, Lifshits chooses the—apparent—detour of discussing the character of Hegel's Early Theological Writings (Hegel 1966/1961). This approach implies that Lifshits did not see a break between the early and the late Hegel; for Lifshits, the Early Writings and the Hegelian Philosophy of Right are integrated into *one* continuous theoretical development.

While the Neo-Hegelians suggested a purely theological or even mystical meaning of the Early Writings, Lifshits emphasizes the Writing's particular characteristic of discussing political issues in a religious form. For Hegel, it was a matter of folk religion in the Early Writings that he wanted to oppose to positive Christianity. The latter together with belief in otherworldly salvation is private and egoistic, while in folk religion the demos of the ancient polis has elevated itself over the private sphere in a movement that Hegel presented as exemplary to his contemporaries. In this religious political sphere, the bourgeois has elevated himself to the status of citizen. He has elevated the private person to that of the political universality of a free people.⁷ The positive religion (ecclesiastical Christianity) is for the young Hegel a mirror of feudal hierarchical conditions in which private interests dominate over universal interests. Folk religion, in contrast, is for him the religion of free republicans. Hegel was glorifying the modern conditions that were emerging across the Rhine in terms of antiquity. This glorification, states Lifshits, neglects the real economic character of these modern conditions but is correct in a world-historical sense: here Hegel formulated the utopia of a free people who had overcome within itself the opposition of the bourgeois and the citizen.

Contemporary Neo-Hegelianism by contrast, states Lifshits, adopts Hegel's opposition of universal and egoistic interests and reformulates it as an opposition of the state and the masses. This is what proves their illegitimacy for Lifshits since this state is a civil state (here "civil" is understood as bourgeois, not as citizen) which in itself is particular as a state representative of egoistic private interests; a pseudo universal. In the twentieth century, continues Lifshits, the struggle against particular interests is not directed against the interests of single individuals who together form the masses, but instead "against the owners of monopolistic private capital who are currently selling the ... people" (Lifschitz 1988, 50). This struggle is being led by the proletariat, the current defenders of the true universal. With this postulate, Lifshits' essay comes to an end.

The proletariat—a "legitimate" heir of Hegel?

This conclusion, although faithful to Soviet ideology, carries a shrill discord which points back to the problems that Lifshits covered up at the beginning with the makeshift term "rhetoric", namely the "state capitalism adorned with socialist rhetoric" (see above). What this conclusion does not address is how the proletarian class struggle against monopolistic private capital behaves in relation to the

⁷ Rousseau's opposition of the concepts "bourgeois" and "citoyen" in "Le contrat social" is decisive here. To highlight this opposition, I will use the English term "bourgeois" for the concept of "bourgeois" and the term "citizen" for the concept of "citoyen" (and not the term "citizen" for both concepts as is sometimes the case in English).

phenomenon of state capitalism. This is because the established system at this point in the Soviet Union, the “state of the proletariat”, was nothing other than state capitalism.

There is, however, one difference between Western and Soviet state Capitalism. The first is distinguished by the close relationship private enterprises (capital) maintain with the state and by more or less direct state intervention in entrepreneurial activities. (One example was the centrally administered economy with private property in Germany during the Nazi era.) In Soviet-style state capitalism by contrast, the state is the monopolistic capital owner. Is it therefore possible to argue that it is the representative of the “true universal”?

Capital organized by the state, regardless of the concrete form of organization (as state control of individual capital or where the state is the sole or main capital owner) does not embody universal interests but instead economic interests. “Economic interest” is simply another term for “egoistic private interest”. Capital interests are always economic, i.e. “egoistic” interests, regardless of whether it is a matter of private capital or state monopoly capital. This is because the interests of (state) monopolistic capital do not represent a universalization of individual interests. Such universalization can only be achieved by rational political means. Submission to capital interest in contrast is submission to a blind, unconscious force and it excludes political mediation of interests. This was clearly demonstrated by the repressions beginning in 1937 which ushered in a brutal industrialization of the Soviet Union; one which disregarded and devastated individual human lives. As this demonstrated, Soviet state capitalism was also not the power of the universal. History has rebutted Lifshits’ postulate: “The proletariat” has also proven to be an “illegitimate heir” of Hegel.

Today, after a further, presently more neoliberal metamorphosis of capitalism, it has become evident that the primacy of economic, “egoistic” interests progressively undermines and destroys the political community that made it possible to develop and articulate universal interests in the first place. In Germany, this was made very clear some time ago by a discussion about “market compliant democracy” (Altenbockum 2012) and is reflected currently in the discussion about the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the EU, the USA and additional states with its negotiations behind closed doors to be concluded without consideration of the will of the general public. The capitalist state was and is—also in its now historical “socialist” form—a state of egoistic private interests, i.e. economic interests, which is virtually the opposite of the Hegelian citizen state in which power embodies the universal. The Hegelian state was and remains a utopia; a desideratum.

II

Is Kojève’s Neo-Hegelianism a “legitimate” heir of Hegel?

What role then does the notion of the state play in Kojève’s Neo-Hegelianism? How do matters stand with the legitimacy of *his* being an heir to Hegel? Does Lifshits’

statement about Neo-Hegelianism in general apply to him? Does he adopt the opposition of universal and egoistic interests from Hegel and reformulate it as the opposition of the state and the masses even though this state as state representative of egoistic private interests itself is something particular and thus a pseudo-universal?

According to Kojève, at the “End of History” (after Napoleon had completed the French Revolution) a world has emerged of slaves without masters/masters without slaves, a world in which the working bourgeois is enslaved by capital. This enslavement by capital must be overcome; and this is not possible without a fight or without the risk of life. Yet there are no longer masters to struggle against. The fight therefore cannot be a class struggle since the working bourgeois is neither master nor slave, “he is—being the Slave of Capital—his *own* Slave. It is from himself, therefore, that he must free himself” (Kojève 1980, 69). He must stop working for property as such, for capital: one can also (and this is, according to Kojève, the definitive Hegelian solution to the problem) work based on the idea of the community, of the state: *one can (and one must) work for the state* (Kojève 1980, 64–65).

Liberation from capital is brought about by terror according to Kojève. The working bourgeois turned revolutionary “must introduce death into his existence” (Kojève 1980, 69). It is in terror that the final state develops, i.e. the state that places the final liberation from enslavement by capital on the agenda, viz., the Napoleonic Empire. This means that permanent terror and senseless beheading comes to an end when all actors submit to state force (a “monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force” *Gewaltmonopol des Staates*). The result is the emergence of a state in which every individual is recognized in his absoluteness; a state that guarantees life, security, freedom and (private) property. In the French Revolution, according to Kojève, “the working Bourgeois (...) were first revolutionaries and then citizens of the universal and homogeneous state (the Napoleonic Empire).” The working Bourgeois, “to become a (...) Citizen of the “absolute” State, *must* become a Warrior”. This warrior existence is a specific one: it “takes the form not of risk on the field of battle, but one of risk created by (...) Terror” (Kojève 1980, 68–69). Through his transformation to citizen—in the purgatory of terror—the working bourgeois frees himself from himself and works henceforth for the state.

In the quote above, the bourgeois is brought into opposition with the citizen: The bourgeois becomes a citizen by overcoming being a bourgeois in the sphere of the universal (in contrast to the bourgeois constraint in egoistic private interests). This corresponds to the notion of elevation “to political universality of a free people” from Hegel’s Early Writings as it is also presented by Lifshits. The Napoleonic state—i.e. the modern constitutional state—is for Kojève the state of the citizen which is superior to the private sphere of the bourgeois. So far, one can say, Kojève remains a “true Hegelian”; and his modern “Napoleonic State” is the Hegelian citizen state.

Yet is the modern state *in fact* the political universal in the sense of Hegel’s Early Writings? To answer this question, I would like at this point to broaden the horizon

with an outline of Marx's discussion regarding the problematic nature of bourgeois and citizen.

Excursus: Marx on bourgeois and citizen

For the early Marx (*On the Jewish Question*, 1843/1844), it is precisely the liberation and transformation of the bourgeois to the citizen as also mentioned in Hegel's Early Writings, which is insufficient and incomplete—an emancipation that is merely political. Political emancipation *divides* man into a member of civil (meaning “bourgeois”) society who lives in a world of egoistic, hostile individuals on the one hand and into an abstract citizen, the moral person, on the other. What Hegel presents as an elevation, is portrayed as an overcoming and transformation by Kojève but is a division for Marx. Political emancipation must, according to Marx, be supplemented by *human emancipation*, in which the real, individual man overcomes the division by re-absorbing the abstract citizen into himself. Human emancipation is accomplished when man recognizes his own powers as social powers which he no longer separates from himself in the form of political power (i.e. the state).

An approach to implementing this human society without a state was the project of council communism (which was historically never successful), in which the communards administrate their working capacity at a grassroots and direct democratic level and distribute the products according to the principle of “fair wages”. All complex questions of a community are to be solved at a grassroots democratic level, which inevitably leads to differences of opinion. Yet how are they to be resolved? Since the community is immediately “human”, then anyone who objects to the currently prevailing view automatically becomes a misanthrope or an “enemy of the people”; and again one has the reign of virtue and terror with its endless orgies of violence.

The elimination of the difference between civil society and a political state [...] is not only not possible, it is also not desirable. If in fact the decisions necessary in society are not taken by representative bodies that are political (as in: [...] withdrawn from civil society and therefore, from a Marxist perspective, foreign and existing outside the material sphere of human life) but are instead established on the basis of binding, grassroots democratic discussions and therefore by society as a whole, criticism of them (these decisions/A.J.) becomes criticism of the people itself; i.e. it becomes subversive (de Berg 2007, 234-235).

Council communism, one might argue, has never been able to stand up in practice and prove whether or how it would function. Although this is true, it is only because when it was successful—during the October Revolution—it invariably and immediately bred terror which replaced council rule with dictatorship. This scenario is not a “chance accident”, but is instead inevitable due to the inherent paradox of “immediate” popular sovereignty, as already outlined by Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* in light of the course of the French Revolution.

Further development of the problem in Marx's theory (outline)

Another solution is indicated soon after by Marx in *The Communist Manifesto* (1847/48) where he speaks of *nationalization* as a communist demand. “The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class” (Marx and Engels 1906, 44–45). Here political power is being used to intervene forcibly in the economic sphere of egoistic private interests and to make the working bourgeois “work for the state”. This is what Kojève so bluntly describes as a purgatory of terror. Marx provides not only the council option but shortly after in the development of his theory also the state communist option (or state socialist, the terms communism/socialism are interchangeable in this case). This means the “nationalization of civil (bourgeois) society” as opposed to the “sublation of the political state” to which the early Marx aspired (for more see: de Berg, 234 ff.), and it is, as shown above, merely another form of state capitalism.

As their theory developed, Marx and Engels moved away from this faith in the state.⁸ A *third* approach by the later Marx⁹ begins to take shape, yet in the twentieth century it was neither recognized nor acknowledged as an *independent* solution; neither within the labor movement, nor in Marxist theory and not by Lifshits. It never played a relevant role. Marx's critique of political emancipation directed his focus away from the contradictions between civil (bourgeois) society and the state to the contradictions *within* civil society itself, i.e., to political economy—the sphere of egoistic individual interests. The early Marx had come to the conclusion that *political* emancipation (the rise of the constitutional state) was not sufficient. Now—for the later Marx—political emancipation should no longer be supplemented or overcome with “*human* emancipation”. It is rather *economic* servitude—by capital, as the later Marx would say—that must be overcome. However it is no longer a matter, as it was for Marx in the *Communist Manifesto*, of recourse to political power to intervene in the economic sphere; nor is it, as Kojève states, a matter of a purgatory that sublimates the bourgeois into the citizen. It is more a matter of *change in the economic sphere itself*, in the sphere of work; a change that is more than just subordination to the political sphere as postulated by Kojève. This insight is the actual beginning of Marx's new draft of a theory that is no longer left-Hegelian, no longer philosophical and no longer communist (in the sense of *The Communist Manifesto*). It is a draft of a social theory that takes shape as the Critique of Political Economy. Marx had drawn up some approaches in this area which were far from consistent and in need of development within the framework of a critical social theory. The quintessence of these approaches lies in the insight that it is first radical change in the sphere of work that would make it possible for a “form of social life mediated essentially by labor” to be replaced by of a “form of life in

⁸ For more on the discussion among contemporary Marxists concerning “faith in the state” in early works by Marx and Engels see: http://www.marx-forum.de/marx-lexikon/lexikon_s/staatseigentum.html (21.03.14).

⁹ Since 1859, when he published *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (first in German *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*).

which labor does not play a socially mediating role ... that would allow for the constitution of another ... form of social mediation” (Postone 1993, 361). “Social life... could be mediated in an overtly social and political fashion. In such a society, a political public sphere could play a more central role than in capitalism” (Postone 1993, 361–362), since it would be free from the constraints of utilization and the enhancement of value as an end in itself. Such a political sphere would be a true “polis”, a state as the “sphere of the spirit” in the Hegelian sense.

In the draft of this critical social theory (*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*) lies Marx’s actual anti-idealist turning point. Whereas Hegel felt that the spirit had now (during his lifetime) attained absolute self-knowledge and that this self-knowledge “only” needed to be realized, Marx sees enormous obstacles standing in the way of such a realization. These obstacles are the contradictions *within* civil (bourgeois) society—in the sphere of egoistic private interests; i.e. economic interests. They condense into a “blind spot” in self-consciousness, into a sphere in which human conditions are mystified, fetishized and obscure. The economy is anything but rational; here one’s own actions appear foreign. The solution to these economic problems for Marx requires “that the socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulate their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature. (...) But it (the sphere of material production, A.J.) nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom” (Marx 1999, 571). It is only this kind of association of producers that would allow something like a Hegelian citizen state to even become a possibility beyond production. This association is not to be equated with the transfer of means of production to state property—euphemistically called “public property” (*Volkseigentum*) as experience has shown with state socialism. If “association” and “nationalization” were (had been) one and the same, then there should never be wage labor, money or capital in state socialism.¹⁰

Kojève between *political emancipation* and *nationalization*

Yet Kojève is not interested in the later Marx’s economic research, nor does he pursue the early Marx’s idea of “human emancipation”, i.e. council communism. He instead alternates between two other solutions to the problem: One is the political emancipation that Marx deemed to be insufficiently qualified, i.e. the constitutional state which also complies with Hegel’s line of thought in his Early Writings. The other (which was not discussed in this essay; see for this: de Berg) is nationalization, or state capitalism called “socialism” (which is in principle identical to Marx’s proposed solution of nationalization in *Communist Manifesto*). The role that he attributes to terror indicates a notion of the constitutional state evolving into a state capitalist social state. Based on the reasons listed above and

¹⁰ As is known, institutionalized Marxism-Leninism argued its way out on this point by stating that there should be two phases of social development, the first was called “socialism” (=“state capitalism”) and the second should someday be “communism” (=“association”). It seems to me, that the status of this statement was however an excuse and/or a deference to the Greek calends.

keeping in line with Lifshits, this nationalization must be characterized as “pseudo-universality”.

Summary

It is possible to say in summary that, for both Kojève and Lifshits, it was a matter of the realization of the utopia of the Hegelian State. In this respect, neither theory is a more “legitimate heir to Hegel” than the other.

Yet for both thinkers, there are factors which Lifshits criticized as “social demagoguery”: Lifshits glorifies the Soviet power state whereas Kojève glorifies the “Napoleonic”, i.e. the western imperialist power state as being a Hegelian-type state, as a sphere of the universal.

As Hegelians, however, they are merely reiterating a gesture from Hegel whose state theory was an answer to the problem that had been posed and left unanswered by the revolution, namely that of the political realization of freedom (see: Ritter 1965). The revolution as negative freedom yields the fury of destruction—terror—which in turn incites the forces of restoration to spring into action. This conflict between revolution and restoration has rocked Europe (and today the entire “Europeanized” world) ever since the French Revolution and has yet to let it come to peace. At the end of his life, Hegel arrives at the conclusion that revolution is the problem that will be passed on unsolved to future generations. The solution to this problem lies for Hegel in the state constitution: Where freedom is made the legal basis, the state must be conceived as the realization of concrete freedom—it becomes a constitutional state.¹¹

This is the only way to understand Hegel in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820): the state is the realization of the ethical idea and is the world that the spirit has made, which is why the state should be revered as an earthly divinity—words that Haym criticized and rejected as “deification of the state”. Also Hegel’s famous reference to what is rational (reasonable) is real (actual) and what is real (actual) is rational (reasonable) (in his “Preface” to *Elements*) sometimes was misunderstood as glorification of the current Prussian state as “the realized ethical idea”. Accepting the current Prussian state was more a case of Hegel’s “realism”; and with it one has to keep in mind that Hegel’s party was that of Prussian Reformers, not Prussian Restoration.

Fluctuating between an ideal of actual popular sovereignty and declaring (glorifying) the modern state as the realization of the ethical idea, as Lifshits detected in Hegel’s Early Theological Writings, is a characteristic both of Hegelian thought itself and of later Hegelianism. This characteristic appears in both Kojève’s Neo-Hegelianism and in the Hegel-Marxism of Mikhail Lifshits. This “fluctuation” indicates an unsolved problem of modernity, whereas the formulation of this problem is the actual “Hegelian heritage”.

¹¹ This relation is presented in detail by Joachim Ritter (Ritter 1965).

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