Kojève and the Problem of Completion
From the first *brouillon* to the end of history

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Abstract

In this study, I propose a different way to approach the thought of Alexandre Kojève by considering an obvious yet overlooked aspect of his corpus. Kojève's legacy, both philosophical and political, is rooted in the idiosyncratic conclusions he draws from his (in)famous interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, namely that Hegel's "*Système du Savoir*" represents a philosophical, political, and historical *terminus ad quem* (referred to as the "end of history"). Most studies of Kojève take this thesis as their point of departure and, consequently, take for granted the fact that his thought is situated in the ambit of denouement, accomplishment and closure. By contrast, I argue that this approach fails to address what is arguably most distinctive about Kojève's work: in stark contrast to the *contents* of his corpus, and his repeated claims of systematic completion, Kojève's actual œuvre, taken as a whole, is marked by its fundamentally fragmented, unfinished, and incomplete *form*. It's this open-ended or incomplete dimension that most calls for interpretation.

It is striking that a thinker renowned for promoting the idea of completion through satisfaction and achievement should have chosen to leave his body of work almost entirely unpublished. Rather than developing a fully systematised and perfected corpus—one that would live up to the standards set by its claims of completion—Kojève left us only with a series of incomplete and inconclusive drafts. This study traces the tension between content and form through a comprehensive analysis of these philosophical *brouillons* from his early works on inexistence and atheism, through his middle period essays on politics, to his later texts on Kant and Hegel. My investigation opens the door to an alternative reading of Kojève: far from composing a philosophy that culminates in the demonstration of completion, satisfaction and resolution, Kojève instead draws us into a web of questions that problematise the status of all these terms.

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To my wife Luana: I thank you for everything and dedicate this thesis to you.

Abbreviations

ARH Alexandre Kojève, 1968. *Essai d'une histoire raisonnée de la philosophie païenne. Volume I*. Paris: Gallimard (all English translations of his text are my own).

BT Martin Heidegger, 1962. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

CPR Immanuel Kant, 1998. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

CTD Alexandre Kojève, 2019. *The Concept, Time, and Discourse*. Translated by Robert B. Williamson. South Bend: St. Augustine Press.

IRH Alexandre Kojève, 1980. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. Edited by Allan Bloom and translated by James H. Nichols Jr. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

LE Alexandre Kojève, 2004. "Latin Empire: Outline of a doctrine of French policy", *Policy Review*, 126 (Aug/Sept), pp. 3-40.

NHH Alexandre Kojève, 2020. "Note on Hegel and Heidegger". Translated by Gennaro Lauro. *Philosophical Inquiries*, VIII(2), pp. 209-220.

OPR Alexandre Kojève, 2000. *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right*. Edited by Bryan-Paul Frost and translated by Bryan-Paul Frost and Robert Howse. Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

PJ Alexandre Kojève, 2013. *Diario del filosofo*. Edited by Marco Filoni translated by Claudia Zonghetti. Torino: Nino Aragno Editore (all English translations of this text are my own).

PhS G.W.F. Hegel, 2018. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated and edited by Terry Pinkard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

People who are content with themselves and especially with their philosophy are not only bad philosophers and people but they are also not interesting.

—Alexandre Kojève, *Atheism*

Every written work can be regarded as the prologue (or rather, the broken cast) of a work never penned, and destined to remain so, because later works, which in turn will be the prologues or the moulds for other absent works, represent only sketches or death masks.

—Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History*

Introduction: A System of Fragments. Kojève's philosophical *brouillons*

The standard reception of Alexandre Kojève can perhaps be summarised by the idea of *completion*. From his declaration that philosophy itself had come to an end in the form of a *Système du Savoir*, to the claim that mankind's historical evolution will definitively end in a universal and homogeneous state, the idea of "the end" is the axis upon which this understanding of Kojève turns. It is a reception which is inextricably linked to his reading of Hegel.[1] That is to say, if the idea of completion acts as a centre of gravity in Kojève's philosophy, then his reading of Hegel can be understood as the focal point through which this force emerges. This study seeks to challenge this interpretation of Kojève's thought. I argue that instead of a philosophy *of* the end, a careful analysis of his corpus taken as a whole reveals a thinker tarrying with the *problem* of completion. By shifting our focus away from his work on Hegel, what is disclosed is the presence of the absence of a centre—a lacuna, a gap—that challenges the very way we think the idea of "the end."

Before entering into this new and unfamiliar terrain, we should first remind ourselves of the outlines of Kojève's famous reading of Hegel. In the last year of his seminars on the

[1] In 1933, Kojève took over a course that was previously taught by Alexandre Koyré at the *École Pratique des Hautes Étude* in Paris entitled, "*La philosophie religieuse de Hegel*" ("The Religious Philosophy of Hegel"). The seminar series, taught continuously by Kojève between 1933 and 1939, covered the full scope of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Through his idiosyncratic and captivating reading of certain passages, Kojève became a well-known lecturer and his classes attracted a group of diverse thinkers, many of whom would become some of the leading French intellectuals following the war: Raymond Queneau, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Lacan, Henri Corbin, Raymond Aron, Michel Leiris, Gaston Fessard and Georges Bataille, amongst many others. Through the efforts of Queneau, these lectures were eventually published in 1947 by Gallimard under the title *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*. For a comprehensive overview of the dissemination of Kojève's thought in France see (Geroulanos, 2010). For a more specific account of how Kojève's reading of Hegel proliferated in French thought see, e.g., (Roth, 1985), (Butler, 1987), (Descombes, 1990), (Jarczyk & Labarrière, 1996), (Kleinberg, 2005), and (Geroulanos, 2010).

Phenomenology of Spirit (*PhS*), delivered in Paris between 1993 and 1939, Kojève asserts that Hegelian "absolute knowledge (*Das absolute Wissen*) is nothing other than 'wisdom' opposed to 'philo-sophy'" (Kojève, 1980, p. 75). According to Kojève, if philosophy is to be understood as the "love" (*philo*) of "wisdom" (*sophia*)—that is, the search or aspiration for truth—then the absolute knowledge described by Hegel in the final chapter of the *PhS* is the completion of the historical journey that ends with the realisation of wisdom itself in the form of a system: "absolute Knowledge is nothing other than the complete System of Hegelian philosophy or 'Science,' which Hegel expounded later in the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*" (Kojève, 1980, p. 31). The element of the *Encyclopaedia* that Kojève hones in on is its circularity. In this text, Hegel describes philosophy as a system made up of a "circle of circles", "a sphere that circles back into itself" (Hegel, 2010, pp. 43, 45). According to Kojève, not only does Hegel describe the circularity of philosophical knowledge but, in so doing, he demonstrated "that this circularity is the necessary and sufficient condition of *absolute* truth—that is, of *complete*, *universal*, and *definitive* (or 'eternal') truth" (Kojève, 1980, p. 94). [2] With Hegel, philosophy is transformed into a circular and complete *Système du Savoir*, a system that marks the end of the search for wisdom and therefore the completion of philosophy itself.

In these same lectures on the *PhS*, the political and historical consequences of this completion are also delineated. According to Kojève, the realisation of a system of knowledge paves the way for the possibility of mankind's definitive satisfaction. This satisfaction takes the form of a universal and homogeneous state where each and every citizen of the world is equally recognised in their humanity. It is the confluence of philosophical and political fulfilment that is captured by what is normally referred to as Kojève's "end of history" thesis.[3]

[2] Kojève even went as far as to say that "idea of circularity is, if you will, the only original element introduced by Hegel" (Kojève, 1980, p. 93).

[3] The end of history thesis was popularised in the work of Francis Fukuyama. Ostensibly borrowing from Kojève, Fukuyama famously declared that humanity as a whole had not just entered a new historico-political period but the end of history as such—that is, the end-point of a political evolution that began in Greece and culminated in

Most studies of Kojève take this *terminus ad quem* as their point of departure and, consequently, take for granted the fact that Kojève's thought is situated in the ambit of recognition, satisfaction, and completion. By contrast, I argue that this proclivity fails to address what is arguably most distinctive about Kojève's thought.[4] Sitting alongside statements of circularity and completion we also find evidence of hesitancy and uncertainty. In fact, we can already catch glimpses of this tension in his reading of Hegel. As we will see, not only does Kojève vacillate on the reality or even *possibility* of a universal and homogeneous state (see, chapter 3), but, even more surprisingly, calls into question the very idea of completion itself, claiming that "the non-circularity of Hegel's system is perfectly obvious" (Kojève, 1980, p. 98). Indeed, lurking just under the surface of Kojève's formulations of a terminal moment in which the circle of historical humanity closes, is a thought that is suspensive, indecisive, and, above all, inconclusive. It is the tension between completion and incompletion that most calls for our attention and interpretation—a characteristic of Kojève's thought that becomes all the more acute as we distance ourselves from his commentary on Hegel and take hold of his wider corpus.

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the universalization of American democratic ideals (Fukuyama, 1992, p. xi). In the aftermath of this influential commentary, it became common for political pundits to reference Kojève and his lectures. However, partly owing to Fukuyama's superficial interpretation, it became just as fashionable for philosophers to mock what they perceived as Kojève's misguided, even naïve, reading of Hegel. For instance, see (Pippin, 1993) and (Stewart, 1996). On the other hand, Jacques Derrida derided Fukuyama and this particular reception of Kojève's work as "*note bene* for a certain Kojève who deserved better," inviting readers to look past the "frenzied exploitation" that attempted to exhibit Kojève's thought as a mere "ideological showcase of victorious capitalism in a liberal democracy" (Derrida, 1994, p. 70).

[4] The first comprehensive study of Kojève is arguably Bernard Hesbois's unpublished PhD thesis, *Le livre et la mort : essai sur Kojève*, who adopts a reading of his corpus as incomplete (Hesbois, 1985). However, this reading quickly gave way to what is now recognised as a standard reading of Kojève that centres almost exclusively on his interpretation of Hegel and the end of history. These works include (Riley, 1981), (Cooper, 1984), (Butler, 1987), (Roth, 1988), (Anderson, 1992), and (Agamben, 2003). Although Dominique Auffret's and Marco Filoni's comprehensive biographies, *Alexandre Kojève: la philosophie* (Auffret, 1990), *l'état, la fin de l'histoire* and *L'azione politica del filosofo* (Filoni, 2021), cover texts that are outside of the remit of Hegel, they both still largely stick to the standard reading of Kojève as a commentator on Hegel.

Over the past two decades, the posthumous publication of texts, essays, and letters has spurred a multitude of recent research which lays claim to a more detailed image of Kojève's philosophical thought. Basing itself on newly available material, this contemporary wave of Kojève studies has operated under the assumption that a comprehensive account of Kojève's philosophy cannot be limited to his reading of Hegel and *a fortiori* his commentary on the end of history, arguing that such a myopic approach has concealed a broad and varied corpus the breadth of which far exceeds the comparatively narrow scope of his Paris seminars.[5] What this scholarship has begun to discover is that Kojève was a protean thinker whose work cannot be reduced to any one idea. In the shadows of his reading of Hegel, we find a restless philosophical undertaking which spans a wide variety of themes—including, but not limited to, investigations on topics as diverse as meontology, Russian sophiology, atheism, quantum physics, authority, law, and a voluminous history of philosophy that culminates in an extensive commentary on Kant.

Thanks to the recent work of intellectual historians, many important documents which were collecting dust in the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* have been unearthed and, in some cases, translated into several languages.[6] However, in performing the unforgiving task of retrieving these texts (which often requires deciphering Kojève's notoriously poor penmanship), these scholars have perhaps unwittingly betrayed the wishes of their author; for

[5] While far from exhaustive, this list includes: Kojève's links to Russian philosophy, see e.g. (Love, 2018), (Wilson, 2019b), and (Jacobs & Wilson, 2024); the idea of system and its links ontology and "energo-logy", see e.g. (Weslati, 2017, 2019) and (Stanciu, 2023); political philosophy, see e.g. (Palma, 2012), (Penzin, 2016), (Varela, 2018), and (Paparusso, 2021); philosophy of nature and quantum physics, see e.g. (Soler, 2001), (Geroulanos, 2010), and (Jacobs, 2023); finally, aesthetics, especially as it is connected to Wassily Kandinsky, see (Florman, 2014).

[6] These works include *L'idée du déterminisme dans la physique classique et dans la physique moderne* (1990), *Le concept, le temps et le discours ; introduction au système du savoir* (1990), *L'athéisme* (1998), *La notion de l'autorité* (2004), *Identité et réalité dans le "Dictionnaire" de Pierre Bayle* (2010), *Diario del filosofo* (2013), *L'enseignement bouddhique du karma* (2022), and *Zum Problem einer diskreten »Welt«* (2023).

what we find in almost every case is a declaration of Kojève's unambiguous intent to keep his words shielded from public view. Kojève refrained from publishing almost all of his manuscripts for one, clearly stated reason: a dissatisfaction with their state of completion. For instance, in the *Philosopher's Journal* (*PJ*), the subject matter of our first chapter, Kojève writes how "in its current form, it is not intended for the reading of others" (Kojève, 2013, p. 3). Likewise, in his essay on *Atheism*, the text we will discuss in chapter 2, Kojève warns that what he has written is, "strictly speaking, only a sketch of my philosophy and thus it is also not final nor can it be published" (Kojève, 2018, p. 187). Similar injunctions against publication continue to be expressed in his political writings as well. In his pamphlet on *The Notion of Authority*, Kojève writes that "since our analyses are inadequate, our deductions can only be incomplete and should be read with caution" (Kojève, 2014, p. 59). Even his most comprehensive exposition on political philosophy, *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right* (*OPR*) a document that stretches over 500 pages, is given the subtitle "Provisional exposition" (*Exposé provisoire*) and is referred to as a "sketch" (*esquisse*) which is both "incomplete and fragmentary" (Kojève, 2000, p. 278). This is to say nothing of his manuscript on Kant which, as will be demonstrated in the fourth chapter, is a draft *par excellence*—a long fragment that does not have any discernible beginning or end and which includes typos, convoluted sentences, and an argument reading like an inner monologue.

It is striking that a thinker renowned for promoting the idea of completion through satisfaction and achievement should have chosen to leave his body of work almost entirely unpublished. As a matter of fact, Kojève only published two book-length texts in his lifetime: the book he is most known for, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (*IRH*) [1947], and the much lesser known first volume of his *Attempt at a Rational History of Pagan Philosophy* (*ARH*) [1968]. But even in these two rare cases where he gave his consent for publication, Kojève also publicly shared his displeasure with their state of completion. In a response to Tran

Duc Thao's review of the *Introduction* for *Les Temps Modernes*, Kojève wrote how he was "especially sensitive to the fact of having published a book in such a chaotic state", a decision which he says, "continues to cause remorse" (Kojève, 2009, p. 349). Even more strongly, in *The Concept, Time, and Discourse* (*CTD*), the text that would serve as the first introduction to his *ARH* (and the subject matter for the fifth chapter of this study), Kojève saw fit to apologise for "a very badly written book" which "contains numerous imperfections, not only of form but as regards content as well" (Kojève, 2019, p. 1).[7] Indeed, far from presenting a fully systematised and perfected corpus—one that would live up to the standards set by its own aspiration and pretence of completion—Kojève left us only with a series of incomplete sketches and inconclusive drafts.[8]

Ironically, it is in the published volume of his *ARH* that Kojève defends his decision to leave most of his work unpublished: "Serious philosophers have generally refrained from publishing (themselves) their 'drafts' [*brouillons*], that is, the (successive or parallel) still too imperfect versions of the exposition which is supposed to be perfect" (Kojève, 1968b, p. 183). Kojève singles out Schelling as one these "serious philosophers," a philosopher whose corpus is littered with unfinished drafts and sketches of a system that would forever remain in a state of incompletion. In his 1809 investigation into the problem of human freedom, Schelling described his own philosophy "as fragments of a whole" (Schelling, 2006, p. 5). The fragmentary presentation of Schelling's work has led some to read his corpus as a series of unconnected stages which, because of their incomplete state, were superseded by the system

[7] Moreover, in correspondence with Leo Strauss prior to the publication of this work he complained that it was "by no means 'ready for publication'", insisting that it was only the prodding of its editor, Raymond Queneau, that convinced him to set aside his reservations: "if Queneau insists, I will not refuse" (Strauss & Kojève, 2000, p. 305).

[8] For his part, James Nichols laments the fact that Kojève's "philosophical project remained incomplete and that he did not find time to perfect some of his texts rhetorically so as more strongly to catch the attention of more readers" (Nichols, 2007, p. ix).

of Hegel. At the same time, it can be argued that if Schelling never produced what can be considered a "complete system" it was not owing to any specific philosophical shortcomings but, rather, because of the way he understood the idea of system itself. Thought within an irresolvable tension, Schelling implies that the "genuine intent" of his system can be approached and understood by way of its state of incompletion (ibid.).[9] Similar to Schelling, Kojève's fragmented and unfinished *brouillons* sit uneasily amongst passages contained in these same drafts which profess to enunciate a complete and closed philosophical system. Yet, rather than viewing this tension as a defect, I argue that the proximity between system and fragment is the defining feature of Kojève' corpus. It is, therefore, only by refusing Kojève's request to refrain from reading his unpublished *brouillons* that we can gain access to the kernel of his thought.

The French noun *brouillon*—a draft or sketch—derives from the verb *brouiller* which means to mix, to shake, to agitate. And this is precisely how Kojève intends his readers to feel as they read his work. As commentators have pointed out, his methodology should be understood as a continuous attempt to *épater,* to provoke and to rattle (Filoni, 2023, p. 17; Bloom, 1987, p. 116). Kojève once remarked that his interpretation of Hegel was intended as "a work of propaganda" that ought "to shake the spirits" (*frapper les esprits*) of his audience (Kojève, 2009, p. 349, translation modified).[10] It is for this reason that Kojève is often understood as engaging in a kind of playful irony.[11] However, we must not mistake this element

[9] As one commentator puts it, "perhaps Schelling's thought provides challenges because it is 'unsystematic' (although, of course, this does not preclude a certain unity of problematic)" (Norman & Welchman, 2004, p. 1).

[10] In the essay, "Hegel, Marx, and Christianity," Kojève explains that "every interpretation of Hegel, if it is more than idle talk, is nothing but a program of struggle and one of work (and one of these "programs" is called Marxism). And this means that the work of an interpreter of Hegel takes on the meaning of a work of political propaganda" (Kojève, 1970, pp. 41-42).

[11] Hugh Gillis argues that irony is a major trope in Kojève's analysis of post-history (Gillis, 2016). Gary Kelly's *Philosophy and Politics at the Precipice* claims to provide a fresh perspective on "the true nature of Kojèvean irony" from the perspective of Kojève's exchange with Leo Strauss (Kelly, 2018).

of his method with a lack of seriousness.[12] Rather, it is intimately tied to the paradoxes and ambiguities that emerge from his struggle with the problem of completion.

By scrutinising the site of this struggle we are drawn into a web of questions—questions that will ultimately dictate the boundaries of my investigation: How can an incomplete and unfinished corpus map out the coordinates of a complete and perfect system? How should we understand a thinker who advances the idea that philosophy has ended in the definitive satisfaction of wisdom while, at the same time, announces this same idea as incomplete, unsatisfactory, filled with "imperfections", and requiring "apologies"? If, as Jean-Luc Nancy asserts, "there is no thinking that is not systematic, that is, does not form a whole" (Nancy & Badiou, 2018, p. 5), then, in the case of Kojève, are we not forced to take seriously the question of what a thinking made up of fragments could mean? We are forced to take seriously these questions not only because they have never been explicitly posed by any of Kojève's readers but, more importantly, because they are questions that are embedded in the very fabric of his thought.

There is no doubt that a thorough reading of Kojève must abandon the standpoint which takes his interpretation of Hegel as its point of departure. That is not to say that Hegel should be expunged from our analysis; such an effacement would swing the pendulum too far in the opposite direction. Instead, I propose to approach Kojève's lectures on Hegel like all of his texts—that is, as just one of the many constitutive elements that make up a larger whole. A basic assumption runs throughout this thesis: while I seek to isolate a red thread that runs through Kojève's varied œuvre, I also maintain that connecting the dots requires each text be approached as a singular undertaking problematically caught within an always shifting totality.

[12] As Trevor Wilson points out, there has been a tendency to dismiss Kojève's political views as "ironic self-indulgence" (Wilson, 2021, p. 30). For instance, Stanley Rosen links Kojève's ironic gestures to a feeling of aristocratic superiority (Rosen, 2007, p. 81). Differently, Roth maintains that this same irony is used as a ploy by Kojève to distance himself in his later writings from what had supposedly became an untenable position in light of political events following the war (Roth, 1985, p. 295).

Adopting this method, this study proposes an alternative reading of Kojève. My goal is to demonstrate that Kojève's corpus should itself be approached and read as an unfinished fragment, an incomplete sketch—a *brouillon*. From the first to his last, each of Kojève's writings that are investigated reveal a struggle with the problem of completion.[13] Yet, rather than proceeding as if these incomplete drafts were accidental or involuntary, I argue that we should approach them as a statement of what is at stake in his philosophical project. In other words, instead of taking as our point of departure the idea of completion and then retracing a path in his philosophy that leads towards this so-called end of history, I argue that "the end" should be treated as a *problem* that can be grasped only in light of Kojève's fragmented and incomplete corpus. Since far from composing a system that culminates in the demonstration of completion, satisfaction and closure, Kojève's thought instead draws us into a terrain that rattles, agitates, and problematises the very status of all these terms.

In the first chapter, I begin by providing reasons for the inclusion of the *PJ* in Kojève's philosophical corpus. Despite a recent turn which has increasingly acknowledged the importance of Kojève's early texts, most scholars have dismissed the philosophical value of the *PJ* and prefer to categorise it as a biographical resource. Instead, as the first *brouillon*, I argue that this text offers the ideal point of departure for an investigation into the problem of completion. In this text, Kojève reveals his ambition to articulate a system based on the "fundamental principle of a philosophy of the inexistent" (Kojève, 2013, p. 3). Ultimately, he only manages to delineate a basic schema of an outline of such a system.[14] Yet, in approaching

[13] In a similar way, Hesbois argues that Kojève's update of the Hegelian system "is the unfinished work of a lifetime. In truth, it was endless […] the shattered fragments of the 'Book' ironically introduce its absence" (Hesbois, 1990, p. 9). My study can be seen in some ways as an extension of Hesbois' work whose analysis was limited almost exclusively to Kojève's interpretation of Hegel and his post-war texts.

[14] As Filoni asserts, in the *PJ*, Kojève "does not fully explain the concept [of the inexistent], and even the terminology used does not lead far. Yet the desire to articulate it in a coherent, systematic discourse is already significant—after all, it is the theoretical ambition that will mark Kojève's entire intellectual path" (Filoni, 2013, x).

this task, we are first introduced to the connection between system and discourse. As we will see, for Kojève, a complete system is equivalent to a philosophical discourse that is able to account for its own possibility. In the *PJ*, the tension between completion and incompletion is presented through a description of the inexistent as an ineffable foundation that problematically acts as both lynchpin and gap within the system.

In the second chapter, I turn to Kojève's second *brouillon*, his 1931 manuscript, *Atheism*. I show how this unfinished draft builds on his nascent philosophy of the inexistent in an attempt to formulate what he calls an "atheistic system". In a way that runs parallel with Heidegger's *Being and Time* (*BT*) and "What is Metaphysics?" essay, Kojève argues that a properly atheistic system must ground itself on a principle of inexistence that avoids reifying the nothing. Moving across various historical examples of negative theology (e.g., St. Augustine, Eriugena, and Meister Eckhart), we are drawn into a web that obfuscates the ostensible differences between theistic existence and atheistic inexistence. What is common to theism and atheism is that they are both ultimately grounded in a *hiatus irrationalis*, "an absolutely irrational abyss" (Kojève, 2018, p. 55). As such, Kojève argues that atheism does not escape the metaphysical presuppositions that form the foundation of theistic belief. Already hinting at his later work, Kojève suggests that the same thorns preventing the closure of "theistic" systems of philosophy (e.g. Kant) remain present in "atheistic" transformations (e.g. Hegel).

The third chapter diverges from an explicit engagement with system in order to confront a specific element of the end of history thesis as it emerges in his 1940s political writings. In a series of outlines and sketches, Kojève introduces his concept of empire, a political form that emerges at history's denouement. Yet, in doing so, he equivocates on its concrete manifestation by presenting two incongruous concepts: one promoting the idea of world empire, a so-called "universal and homogeneous state," and another advocating a multi-polar organisation of

empire-states working in tandem to delay world unity. I analyse this tension in Kojève's political thought and suggest how his concept of empire is related to the political theology of Carl Schmitt, in particular, his concept of the *katechon*, an ambiguous political power that withholds or restrains the end of historical time. Linking this claim to the wider concerns of this thesis, I argue that empire participates in the problem of completion by both announcing and preventing the actualisation of the end of history.

In the fourth chapter, I return to the problem of system through an analysis of Kojève's post-war manuscript, *Kant*. In this unpublished draft, Kojève attempts to provide an interpretation of Kant's philosophy read through the lens of the gap. He argues that although Kant provides the formal conditions necessary for a complete system, the lingering presence of a gap in the Critical edifice reveals an implicit decision to reject wisdom in order to continue to philosophise. Here the link between system and discourse becomes sharper. Borrowing from Hans Vaihinger, Kojève claims that Kant introduces into philosophy a "pseudo-discourse" in the mode of the "as-if" (*comme-si*). The "as-if" functions as a bridge between the theoretical and the practical (i.e., nature and freedom) while, at the same time, camouflaging over the gap in the Critical philosophy. In this way, Kojève demonstrates the tension between completion and incompletion through a philosophical discourse that is presented only "as-if" it were circular and, hence, complete.

In the final chapter, I investigate an underexplored aspect of Kojève's reading on Hegel. Although it is often cited, little attention has been paid to the role played by Heidegger in this interpretation. I argue that Heidegger enters into Kojève's "update" at the site of what he calls Hegel's "basic error", the presupposition of an ontological monism. Through a (perhaps *violent*) reading of *BT*, Kojève claims to augment Hegel's *Logic*, transforming it into a dualist ontology that distinguishes between a discursive human history and a silent nature. In ways that build upon his analysis of Kant, I unpack his hybridisation of Hegel and Heidegger to argue

that rather than providing the capstone which crowns the completion of the system, the terminal point of Kojève's philosophy remains suspended in a paradoxical *discursive silence* at the site of its supposed closure. Thus, although Kojève claims that Hegel achieves a complete and circular philosophical discourse in the form of a *Système du Savoir*, I demonstrate that what we in fact find is not a synthesis or resolution but rather a *tension* between discourse and silence that problematises the idea of completion which his end of history thesis implies.

Chapter 1: Origins of a Philosophy of the Inexistent

1.1. Introduction: A point of departure

Recent scholarship has increasingly acknowledged that Kojève's thought is not reducible to his reading of Hegel and that the general principles of his philosophy can already be located in a collection of "early period" texts. While important for understanding his idiosyncratic commentary of the *PhS*, these texts speak to a train of philosophical thought that lies outside the scope of his more familiar writings. These works include, but are not limited to, his doctoral dissertation on the *Religious Metaphysics of Vladimir Solovyov,* a manuscript on *Atheism,* and an investigation on the transition from classical to modern physics in *The Idea of Determinism*.[15] Kojève made the decision to shield these texts from public view; however, their recent publication and translations invite us to reflect upon a burgeoning philosophical thought that had been otherwise collecting dust in the Bibliothèque nationale de France.[16] This opening chapter seeks to shed further light on the evolution of Kojève's thinking by exploring another early period text that has yet to receive the scholarly treatment it deserves.

Between 1920 and 1923, Kojève wrote a series of notebooks which contain the details of what he called the "fundamental principles of a philosophy of the inexistent" (*filosofiya nesushchestvuyushchego*)" (Kojève, 2013, p. 5). As I will show, the elaboration of these

[15] (Kojève, 2018b), (Kojève, 2018), (Kojève, 1990b).

[16] For instance, Stefanos Geroulanos focuses mainly on the *Atheism* manuscript to "reintroduce" Kojève as an anti-humanist thinker (Geroulanos, 2010). Placing emphasis on the Solovyov text, Jeff Love attempts to position Kojève within the context of a Russian literary, theological, and philosophical tradition (Love, 2018). Finally, Hager Weslati, through several articles, has revisited Kojève's early work arguing that they contain the foundations of his later ontology (Weslati, 2019). While the religious element of his thought has received increased attention, his work on modern science, especially quantum physics, has been less studied. The recent publication of a 1929 essay on "*Zum Problem einer diskreten »Welt«"* [On the problem of a discrete 'world'] approaches modern physics from an eclectic mixture of phenomenology (Heidegger) and set theory. For more on this work, see the editors introduction by Isabel Jacobs (Jacobs, 2023).

"fundamental principles" reveals a thought in an embryonic stage of development; by tracing out the contours of this nascent phase of his philosophical thought, we gain entry to a different point of access to his later philosophy—one that spotlights the idea of inexistence.

Like his other texts written in this "early" period, these philosophical notebooks—collectively referred to as the *Philosopher's Journal* (*dnevnik filosofa*)[17]—have only recently been published. Yet, despite the focus on Kojève's other early material, most scholars have looked to the *PJ* only as a biographical source, dismissing its philosophical value.[18] Those that have held this view make reference to a lack philosophical rigor, a disconnect from his later work, and the fact that Kojève himself deemed the text unworthy of being published. However, once each of these claims is investigated, what is instead revealed is how the *PJ* offers a unique portal into the origins of a terminology and method which is instrumental for the understanding of his later philosophy—a philosophy which, in fact, raises distinct questions regarding "philosophical rigour" by challenging the way we think about completion itself. Although the principles of a philosophy of the inexistent are sketched out in a cursory manner, their rudimentary form already reveals certain tendencies that will linger and reverberate in his readings of Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger. Thus, notwithstanding the lack of attention placed on these notebooks, I will argue that they represent a significant contribution to his corpus, serving as a compelling point of departure.[19] My goal in this opening chapter is, therefore, to outline

[17] Currently held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, they were first translated and published in Italian in 2013.

[18] A.M. Rutkevich is one of the more prominent Kojève scholars to be sceptical of this text. He argues that "for all their biographical value, [the *Journal*] gives comparatively little to understand his future philosophy." While saying this, however, Rutkevich is willing to concede that it provides a rare glimpse into the origins of Kojève's philosophical thought, including, amongst others, the influence of Nāgārjuna's Buddhism, early reflections on German Idealism, and sketches for an ontology (Rutkevich, 2015).

[19] As far as I am aware, besides Kojève two biographers, Marco Filoni and Dominique Auffret (both mentioned below), only Claudia Cimmarusti and Hager Weslati have written on the contents of Kojève's *Journal* in any detail. In the first case, Cimmarusti, in her doctoral thesis, describes various passages of the notebooks, but does so mostly to introduce biographical elements and Kojève's thought in general (Cimmarusti, 2017). In the case of Weslati, she focusses primarily on one specific entry which Kojève called "Descartes and Buddha." In doing so, she describes in detail "the quadruple relation where thought, existence, being, and the real are respectively

the features of Kojève's nascent philosophy of the inexistent with a view to how it participates in both the development of his philosophy and, more importantly, our reception of it.

1.2. The first *brouillon*: A philosopher's journal

Under the name Kožévnikov, the philosopher we now refer to as Kojève began keeping a notebook of his thoughts from 1917 while still residing in Russia. At the beginning of 1920, he took these early philosophical ruminations with him as he fled, leaving behind a country in the midst of civil war.[20] After a brief yet remarkable experience in Poland, which saw him contract Typhus while being detained in a Polish prison for several months under the suspicion of espionage, he eventually gained entry into Germany. During this turbulent period, he wrote feverishly (and always in his native Russian). Unfortunately, only a short time after arriving, his suitcase, along with the notebooks it contained, was stolen. Although he describes the loss as "irreparable", in the wake of the theft Kojève immediately set about reassembling its contents from memory. Notwithstanding his best efforts, being unable to remember thoughts from two or three years ago, Kojève admits that the endeavour to approximate the notebook's original structure was imperfect. In piecing back together his thoughts, he added many "digressions" and "elaborated *ex novo*" many of the questions (Kojève, 2013, p. 5). Therefore, although never physically recovered, the original notebooks were at least partially recuperated and, in fact, elaborated.

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coupled with the negative premises of the unintelligible, the inexistence, non-being, and the non-real" (Weslati, 2017, p. 49). Although Lorenzo di Maria refers to these notebooks in his doctoral thesis, when he points out the parallel between Kojève's "desire for desire" (as the negation of non-being) to his early writing on the philosophy of the inexistence he does not elaborate on the connection (Maria, 2015). Interestingly, one of the foremost scholars on Kojève, Boris Groys, presumably unaware of the notebooks existence at the time, published in Russian his own *Diary of a Philosopher* (*Dnevnik Filosofa*) in 1989.

[20] For a detailed account of Kojève's early years, see (Filoni, 2021, pp. 23-147).

Besides merely clarifying or expanding upon prior ideas, over the next four years Kojève would continue to add to the contents of the *PJ* as he attended courses taught by some of the leading German intellectuals of the time (including Karl Jaspers, Max Walleser, and Heinrich Maier) at universities in Berlin and Heidelberg. In total, three notebooks and an assortment of scattered writings were found among the papers in his archive.[21] Included in this collection is a "Preface" which clarifies the status and contents of the notebooks:

> What you will find in this notebook bears the name of "journal", but a diary it is not, at least not in the common sense of the term. It is true that the annotations all follow a date, but it is a purely external demarcation. What you will find written here has little to do with everyday reality and the time. There is almost nothing [written] about my life. This is why I called it a *philosopher's* journal (Kojève, 2013, p. 3).

Yet, as one reads through the pages there appears—at least at first sight—a disjunction between Kojève's description and the substance of the notebooks. Although he is adamant that there is almost nothing written about his life, sprinkled throughout the text are, among other things, accounts of salacious encounters with prostitutes, reflections about the death of his stepfather, and the solitude of his new life in Western Europe. We also find passages related to the "everyday reality and time" such as ruminations on antisemitism and war. Thoughtful reflection and personal anecdote, the philosophical and the mundane, become so entwined in the *PJ* that Kojève himself warns that "in its current form" it is "not intended for the reading of others." At the same time, as if to encourage the reader to look past its chaotic presentation, Kojève insists that, as a whole, the notebooks "manage to take the form of a coherent story"

[21] The editors of the Italian translation describe the contents as follows: "The four notebooks are numbered as follows: IIIa (drawn up starting from 1 October 1920: reconstructs the pages of the *Journal* written between 1917 and 1920 which were lost in September 1920); IIIb (annotations from 1 October 1920 to 31 December 1920; it also contains a provisional outline to an *Essay on the Philosophy of Religion*); IIIc (drawn up starting from January 1, 1921); Ia (contains annotations written between October 15, 1920 and January 22, 1921 which form the *Essay on the Philosophy of Religion*). This last notebook also contains various scattered sheets, with sporadic annotations until April 1923, shown here in the *Appendix*" (p. xiii).

and "are of tremendous value, not only for the writings, projects, and materials they contain, but, most importantly, as a history of the evolution of my thinking" (Kojève, 2013, p. 3).

Given the distance between his injunction against reading and the value he places on the content of the *PJ*, it remains an open question as to how we ought to approach this text. My argument in favour of including this early manuscript in Kojève's *philosophical* corpus (and not merely as an artefact of his "intellectual history") is based on a number of factors. The first is related to Kojève's reluctance to publish *in general*. As I have already mentioned in the Introduction (and which I will reiterate throughout this thesis), Kojève resisted publication at every turn of his career. In fact, nearly all of the texts that this thesis will explore were unpublished in Kojève's lifetime.[22] For instance, in *Atheism* (which I will return to in chapter 2) we find almost the exact same sanction as in the *PJ*: "What I am writing here, strictly speaking, is only a sketch of my philosophy and thus it is also not final, nor can it be published" (Kojève, 2018, p. 187). And yet recent scholarship has begun to see this text as perhaps one of the most important in his collected works.[23] I see no reason to dismiss the prohibition against reading *Atheism* while honouring it in the case of the *PJ*. Indeed, to dismiss a text based solely on the author's sanction is, at best, hasty and, at worst, offensive. It is enough to remind ourselves of Max Brod's decision to ignore Kafka's request to have all his works burned after he died.

[22] The sole exception to this is the *IRH*. Yet, even here, Kojève was only responsible for the introduction and the footnotes. The vast majority of the text was written based on notes by Raymond Queneau. Furthermore, Kojève expressed regret that his lectures were published without his direct input. I will have occasion to discuss this again in chapter 5.

[23] One of the scholars to do so is James H. Nichols J. who writes that although "Kojève wrote the statement that it is unfinished and therefore should not be published, it is nonetheless of considerable interest as an expression of his philosophic inquiries prior to his becoming the Hegelian for which he is chiefly known" (Nichols, 2007, p. 14). More recently, Trevor Wilson has gone as far as to say that *Atheism* is the "smoking gun" that offers the key to understanding Kojève's reading of Hegel (Wilson, 2019b, p. 33).

Like any philosophical text, the *PJ* should be judged based on its philosophical value alone.[24] And, as Kojève himself insists, this value is present precisely as it relates to the evolution of his philosophical thought, which leads us to an important question. If the "fundamental principles" found in his earliest text indeed undergo a series of transformations as Kojève develops his system, then why not begin our analysis when such a system—or, at least, a more coherent set of concepts—is presented? Is it not possible to avoid this excursion into his burgeoning thought by skipping straight ahead to his text on *Atheism* or—as is more commonly done—to his seminars on Hegel? Answering this question is one of the central motivations of this opening chapter. As I allude to in the introduction, much of the difficulties in understanding Kojève's philosophy in general, including his interpretation of Hegel, stem from an inability to pin down a central theme running through his (admittedly, *varied*) corpus. The lack of a well-defined philosophical problematic—one which borders on evasion—has led commentators to remark on the difficulties (and, indeed, frustration) involved in categorising his work.[25] Indeed, it sometimes appears that the value and method of categorisation comes under question itself in Kojève.

This presents us with a stubborn problem. However, on this point, it is interesting to note that in the *PJ* Kojève himself describes the principles of the inexistent as a "red thread" that "resonates" in every question faced (Kojève, 2013, p. 5). While I do not claim that this thread is in any way definitive for understanding the whole of Kojève's philosophy, I do claim

[24] Marco Filoni contends that the commentaries found in the *PJ* "are truly impressive for their extension: a catalogue that ranges between the most disparate fields" and that despite Kojève's objections to reading the text, it is certain that "after almost a hundred years, these pages are decidedly interesting in more than one respect" (Filoni, 2013, p. x).

[25] It is in this sense that Nichols speaks for many readers when he says that Kojève's writings "are remarkably difficult and dense, and filled with difficult and unfamiliar terminology" (Nichols, 2007, p. 42). A more recent example of this is seen in Jeff Love's *Black Circle*. In this text, Love attempts to shed light on the "Russian literary, theological, and philosophical tradition from which Kojève sprang" (Love, 2018, p. 2). Despite his efforts to isolate and highlight Kojève's links to the Eastern philosophical tradition, he nevertheless vacillates as whether we should read him as a "a progressive thinker, a Marxist, or as a jocular misanthropist, a sort of Mephistopheles? Or both?" (Love, 2018, p. 177).

that the philosophical value of the *PJ* lies precisely in its rudimentary form; if there is indeed a "red thread" running through his corpus, I argue that we must begin where it is first laid down. Although I will approach all Kojève's texts as drafts, each depicting a different stage of his development, the *PJ* provides the initial point of entry into his philosophy. It is, indeed, the first *brouillon*.

Through an analysis of this embryonic stage of Kojève's thinking, a path will begin to open up leading into his later work. For this reason, throughout this chapter I will take the opportunity to look ahead to make visible this road. Having said that, I do not want to assume too much, as has been the tendency of some interpreters of Kojève.[26] By allowing this early text to speak for itself, it is my intention to let it charter its own course. This balancing act is motivated by the contention that, being only his first *brouillon*, the *PJ* does not offer a definitive account of his thought but serves as a compelling propaedeutic, a jumping-off point to dive into an encounter with his later, still largely unexplored, philosophy.[27]

[26] I am thinking here of certain commentators that read Kojève, both prior to and after his seminars, through the lens of the master-slave relation. This is perhaps more common in earlier commentaries that arrived before the publication of some of Kojève's earlier texts, but it is a tendency that has unfortunately continued up to the present. To pick just one recent example, Timothy Burns has written that, according to Kojève, "the Master-Slave synthesis is adequate to explain modern *and* classical thought, or to get at the truth of the matter, as Hegel had done" (Burns, 2016, p. 42). Rory Jeffs, in a forthcoming article for the *Continental Philosophy Review*, echoes this sentiment stating that "for many readers of Kojève, the beginning and end of the System is taken to be contained within his interpretation of Hegel" (Jeffs, *forthcoming*).

[27] Geroulanos, taking a similar position, argues that "while American commentary on Kojève has centred on the Hegel book and his debate with Leo Strauss on tyranny and modernity, French commentary has emphasized the influence of the Hegelian instruction and has tried to demonstrate why Kojève's reading of Hegel was useful but flawed, indeed how it is possible to return *de Kojève à Hegel*. Much further commentary has been unphilosophical, often restricted altogether to the argument on the 'struggle for recognition,' and (among Kojève's partisans) downright elegiac." Instead, Geroulanos argues for "a reinterpretation of Kojève's Hegel on the basis of archival and recently published material. Focusing the antihumanist question at this material facilitates a reading of Kojève that is more attentive to his original terminology and the tropes and contradictions of his complex early works" (Geroulanos, 2010, pp. 135-136).

1.3. Putting the question into question

The focus of the *PJ* is an investigation into the fundamental principles of a philosophy of the inexistent; however, nowhere in the *PJ* does Kojève provide a precise definition of the term "inexistent."[28] In an entry of the *PJ* entitled "On the Problem of Terminology in the Philosophy of the Inexistent", Kojève explains how one encounters difficulties when attempting to find adequate statements to express it and, at first, he seems to suggest that this inadequacy is terminological: "I encounter difficulties finding an adequate terminology to understand and explain the inexistent" (Kojève, 2013, p. 48). At the same time, he acknowledges a more fundamental problem, surmising that language itself is unable to "express the thought of the inexistent into words" (ibid., p. 45). In this way, Kojève joins Kant as one of the few philosophers to complain about the inadequacy of language in order to expound his thinking. Every attempt at a formal definition or statement about the inexistent points towards its evasive character: "Language is so inadequate to express the inexistent, that I find myself forced into expressions of the type: 'the existence of the inexistent' or the 'inexistent reality' and so on" (ibid., p. 48). Here we catch our first glimpse of Kojève's elusive style. For it is not that he purposefully evades the object of his philosophical investigation, rather what is at stake here, in his earliest philosophical ruminations, is the possibility of definition itself. There is something tantalising about the inexistent, a feature that is highlighted throughout the *PJ* with appeals to its incommunicability and inexpressibility. The question that Kojève wants to ask concerns the inexistent, but the very nature of the inexistent seems to prevent such a questioning. From the outset, the inexistent is positioned with respect to an inaccessible horizon

[28] According to Weslati, the inexistent "describes an autonomous field of philosophical investigation whose aim is to generate a set of concepts on which the system can subsequently be founded." I think that the word 'subsequently' should be emphasised. Despite having the ambition to do so, the author of the *Journal* is still far from being able to construct anything close to a philosophical system nor, as Weslati herself points out, "are there any specific indications as to what this fantasy system would look like or what purpose it would serve" (Weslati, 2017, pp. 48-49).

that can be approached only obliquely. Consequently, as Kojève explains, the "main work in the journal falls on the understanding of the question itself—that is, on how to put the question into question" (ibid., p. 91).[29]

The task of putting the question into question demands that the horizon situating the inexistent be circumscribed. Kojève begins by asking if a terminological distinction can be made between "inexistence" (*nesushchestvuyushchiy*) and something which "does not exist" (*ne sushchestvuyet*). From a straightforward grammatical point of view the difference is, as Kojève himself admits, "very subtle". However, the motivation behind the terminological distinction is clear: to delineate between a particular "non-existent" object and a more radical form of inexistence that demarcates the limit of existence as such—or, as Kojève puts it, to distinguish between "the non-existent as a non-real that exists and the inexistent *per se*" (Kojève, 2013, p. 48). What Kojève refers to as the "non-existent" is also sometimes referred to as a negative existential, represented in phrases such as "There are no such things as unicorns" or "Monsters do not exist". Here existence is posited only to be immediately negated. Let's take another example, one that happens to be a favourite of Kojève's and that is utilised throughout his corpus: the square-circle. As a specific problem in the history of mathematics, the square-circle (or, perhaps more accurately, the act of squaring the circle) references the construction of a square, using a straight-edge and a compass, with the same area as a given circle. This problem, as we now know, is not only difficult but impossible to solve owing to the properties of the circle (e.g., the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter, π, is a

[29] We recall here Heidegger's claim that metaphysics must be able to "introduce itself" (Heidegger, 1998, p. 82). In many ways the *PJ* anticipates themes which will appear in Heidegger's question of the nothing in "What is Metaphysics?" (1929). It is therefore unsurprising that in 1931 Kojève will make a direct appeal to this essay when expanding his philosophy of the inexistent to the question of atheism (see chapter 2).

transcendental number).[30] Thus, the "square-circle"—that is, a representation of a square with an area of π multiplied by the square of the radius can nowhere be found in experience, i.e., the square-circle does not exist. [31] But what kind of existence is being denied here? Even though we cannot have a square-circle placed before our eyes, we are nonetheless in possession of a thought of this geometrical entity. That is, while it may be impossible to *physically* construct a square with an area identical to a given circle, there is no problem at all in *thinking* of a square with an area equal to πr^2. The thought of an object, even one that has no empirical existence, is still thought of as some*thing*.[32] As Kojève will say in his text on *Atheism*, the squared circle "surely does not exist" "but this does not prevent us from speaking and defining its qualities"; the square circle, despite its contradictory properties remains "*something* and not nothing" (Kojève, 2018, p. 2; 132). Instead of pointing toward an idea of the inexistent, the non-existent square-circle compels us to ask a different question altogether—namely, "What *is*?". In what sense can we say the square-circle "is" despite its "not existing" and is it possible to think inexistence in a still more radical way?

[30] It was well-known beforehand that if π were a transcendental—that is, not an algebraic irrational number, i.e., the root of a polynomial with rational coefficients—then the construction of a square-circle would be impossible. That π is, in fact, transcendental was proven by Ferdinand von Lindemann and Karl Weierstrass in 1882.

[31] The "squared-circle" has been used as a metaphor for the inconceivable and ineffable. The most recognisable example is found in the final canto of the *Divine Comedy* where Dante compares the attempt to describe the existence of the squared circle with his inability to understand the immediate presence of the divine: "As is the geometer who wholly applies himself to measure the circle, and finds not, in pondering, the principle of which he is in need, such was I at that new sight. I wished to see how the image conformed to the circle and how it has its place therein; but my own wings were not sufficient for that, save that my mind was smitten by a flash wherein its wish came to it. Here power failed the lofty phantasy; but already my desire and my will were revolved, like a wheel that is evenly moved, by the Love which moves the sun and the other stars" (Alighieri, 2005).

[32] For example, Hume claimed that to think of an object is always and necessarily to think of an existent object, or, to put it differently, to think of a thing and to think of it as existing are equivalent. In his *Treatise of Human Nature*, he claims that "there is no impression nor idea of any kind, of which we have any consciousness or memory, that is not conceived as existent" (Hume, 2009, p. 114). In other words, the concept of an object includes the concept of existence.

The circuitous presentation of the philosophy of the inexistent calls attention to what would ostensibly be its opposite: a philosophy of existence.[33] Important for Kojève's philosophical development was his connection with Karl Jaspers during the 1920s. Beginning in 1921, Kojève attended lectures of Jaspers, whose *Existenzphilosophie* would mark his name in the history of Western thought.[34] Beyond this initial encounter the two remained in close contact, culminating in Jaspers supervising Kojève's doctoral thesis on Vladimir Solovyov in 1926. Little work has been done exploring this association, yet it is likely that Kojève's early thinking was influenced by his teacher.[35] There are, indeed, many shared philosophical connections between the two thinkers but I would like to call attention to one: a specific congruity between their respective philosophical point of departures, a commonality that paves the way for a divergence.

Jaspers claims that philosophy must begin with the question of existence: "What *is*?", a question that compels us to ask: What is Being? What is that which holds everything together, underlying everything, out of which everything that is, first arises? The history of philosophy is guided by this question and has produced various ontologies (e.g. water, fire, matter, spirit, etc), but all these attempts seem to fail to capture the essence of "what *is*"—of Being. Jaspers argues that this failure results from a concept of existence that already presupposes itself. That

[33] This is not without its complications. As we will see later, the inexistent will seek to orient, what Kojève will call, an "atheistic philosophy". For this, Kojève will have to contend with the issue of how to distinguish the inexistent God from the God of negative theology. It is already clear in the *Journal* how Kojève is trying to delineate the inexistent as a more primordial form of nothingness that is prior to negation, not unlike Heidegger in his essay, "What is Metaphysics?". For more on this see, chapter 2.

[34] According to Filoni, the official register of the University of Heidelberg has Kojève enrolled starting from the summer semester 1922, but he had been attending courses at the philosophy faculty since the summer of the previous year. The problem was that he was unable to present the necessary documents to enrol before 1922 (Filoni, 2021, p. 106).

[35] As Filoni points out, "it is not coincidental that [Kojève] decided to write his dissertation on Solovyov under Jaspers. The philosophical landscape opened by Jaspers found correspondence to the various 'philosophical projects' he had initiated and outlined in the *PJ*, especially concerning the philosophy of the inexistent" (Filoni, 2021, p. 108).

is to say, the answer to the question, "What is Being?", is answered with reference to some*thing*. According to Jaspers, the flaw in this approach is located in the attempt to apprehend Being as something that is thought—that is to say, something that is posited in consciousness. Jaspers says that the structure of consciousness means that we are always caught within a subject-object *split* [*Spaltung*] such that whenever the question "What is?" is posed we already have in mind an object thought by a subject. If everything that enters into consciousness already implies an internal division between subject and object, then any attempt to express Being as such will founder within a trap that consciousness has already set for itself. Even thinking itself remains ensnared in this bind, since the thought that thinks itself is, by its very act of thinking, made into a thinking thing—a *res cogitans*. Thought is both the product and producer; it is both the condition of possibility for the object as well as an object itself.

It is precisely from this entanglement that the basic idea of Jaspers' philosophy of existence emerges: the "Encompassing" (*das Umgreifende*). The Encompassing is the name Jaspers gives to the form of consciousness that is obscure to itself. It describes a primordial background that transcends the subject-object split: "if we want to *think* about the encompassing, we must immediately make it into something objective; [yet] this is precisely what thinking about the encompassing is supposed to transcend. If we seek the ground of everything in the encompassing, we may no longer take any object for the encompassing" (Jaspers, 1971, p. 19). If thought thinking itself thinks itself as an object, then the encompassing must itself transcend even this relation. This introduces a problem that we have already encountered. Echoing Kojève's discussion on the difficulties in speaking of the inexistent, Jaspers says that in thinking about the Encompassing we cannot help but use determinate concepts; thus, the attempt to define itself reveals its own discursive limit whereby every statement referring to it "contains a paradox" (ibid.). As the condition for the possibility of

thought, the encompassing shirks back from its own revelation designating an insuperable, incommunicable, and abyssal origin.[36]

Despite their ostensibly opposed points of departure, there nevertheless appears to be a parallel between Jaspers' philosophy of existence and Kojève's nascent reflections on the philosophy of the inexistent. In a section of the *PJ* entitled "On the Limitation of Thought in the Process of its Interpretation and Exposition", Kojève emphasises the same capture of thought and Being that is referenced in Jaspers' *Spaltung:* "Thought and Being are substance synonyms, since they reciprocally determine one with the other and one without the other cannot exist"; or, said slightly differently, "only being that is thought exists and exists only inasmuch as it is thought" (Kojève, 2013, p. 29).[37] For Kojève, it is impossible to "think" inexistence since thought thinking itself is already ensnared in a kind of "existential" bind: "Thought makes thought thinkable, realizes and limits it, and for this reason—realising and limiting itself—exists as such" (ibid.). But, just like Jaspers, Kojève understands this trap as pointing to a way out. Different from Jaspers, however, Kojève is not interested in the question of existence. Whereas Jaspers thinks the encompassing as *transcending* the horizon of the

[36] In this way, the Encompassing has affinities with Heideggerian Dasein. In *BT*, Heidegger cites Jaspers' *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (1919) as illuminating the basic existential-ontological signification of 'limit-situations' (Heidegger, 1962, p. 496). Of course, in the 1930s and afterwards, Jaspers will try to take distance from Heidegger. I return to Heidegger in the following chapter where I discuss sections of *BT* along with his essay "What is Metaphysics?".

[37] What Kojève is here calling reciprocity seems to point toward what Quentin Meillassoux calls the correlation: "the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other" (Meillassoux, 2008, p. 5). In *After Finitude*, Meillassoux maintains that correlationism represents the "central notion" of all continental philosophy since Kant (i.e., the so-called "Copernican Revolution"), but its roots can be found already in Hume, Berkeley, and, in fact, even all the way back to Parmenides. To justify this, Meillassoux says that the correlation has taken various forms in philosophy, but also different kinds. So-called "weak correlationism" claims that it is impossible to achieve knowledge of being "in-itself" without falling into self-contradiction. The quintessential example in philosophy is the Kantian thing-in-itself: perfectly thinkable but absolutely *unknowable*. Conversely, "strong correlationism" denies even the thought of the in-itself, that is, a move from the "unknowability" of the thing-in-itself to its "unthinkability" whereby Being becomes so opaque to thought that it "transgresses the most elementary principles of the logos" (ibid., p. 75). The idea of Being and thinking as wholly other is what Kojève seems to be gesturing at in his explication of the inexistent.

subject-object split in order to glimpse existence as such, Kojève interrogates the same subject-object split in order to pry it open.[38] He argues that if existence depends upon the "reciprocity" of thinking and Being, to proceed toward the inexistent it is necessary to interrogate the *detachment* between the two.

Kojève suggests that it is only by severing the relation between thought and Being, splicing it apart, that an inexistent horizon comes into view. This breaking apart of the subject-object relation is not in order to reveal the subject and object as they are in themselves; rather, like Jaspers' encompassing, it is to look beyond this relation at the site of its condition of possibility. The difference for Kojève is that this relation is not superseded by an all-embracing encompassing that transcends it. Instead, Kojève says that the split cleaves into two, a rupture between thought and Being that reveals itself as a relation conditioned by both an "all-encompassing Being that has not been the object of thought" and "thought as such," a "pure idea" that is "not itself thinkable" (ibid.). If thought and Being exist in and through their correlation, then, for Kojève, the breaking of this bond frees both sides of the relation—pure thought and being—to their own indeterminate inexistence. These rudimentary reflections seem to anticipate a difficult aspect of Kojève's reading of Hegel where he introduces what he calls a dualistic ontology that separates between natural and human being. I will delve into this aspect of his thought in more detail in chapter 5, but I will mention here that by ontological dualism Kojève does not mean a division between subject and object, but a more primordial separation between pure identical Being, i.e., nature as such, and the nothingness of the negating (i.e., thinking) human being. In his lectures on Hegel, he argues that it is only the reciprocal relation of Being and negating nothingness that precipitates the existence of the

[38] Filoni argues that Kojève's philosophy "aims at precisely the opposite of what Parmenidean ontology affirmed: he is convinced not only of the reality of the inexistent, but is also committed to thinking about it, therefore, rejecting the identity of thinking and being" (Filoni, 2021, p. 63). However, Filoni does not elaborate on what he means by this. Similarly, Dominique Auffret argues that Kojève intends to "oppose the inexistent to Parmenidean Being" (Auffret, 1990, p. 95). However, much like Filoni, Auffret does not elaborate any further on this claim.

human being in the world; outside of this relation, nature is unthinkable and the human being has nothing to think: in themselves they are both inexistent.

The problem Kojève faces when communicating this idea in his lectures on Hegel is the same as what is already present in the *PJ*. If thought thinking itself is already wrapped up in a reciprocity that makes thinking into its own object, how can one think "pure thought" (or, conversely, "pure being") without falling back into the subject-object split or, conversely, paradoxical and contradictory expressions? Kojève is well aware that what he is proposing is not easy to think about—quite literally by definition. What we are being asked to consider is the possibility of thought that bars itself. Unsurprisingly, when probing the question of the inexistent, Kojève's writing is strained and, in most places, difficult to follow. At one point he even writes that "I am convinced that no one will ever be able to understand what I write" (ibid., p. 45). Yet, instead of resisting the incommunicability, Kojève leans into this tension, raising the stakes, by centring it as the very principle of the inexistent. This attempt is best illustrated in the most enigmatic entry in the *PJ* entitled "Descartes and Buddha".

In this entry, Kojève instigates an encounter between "two cultures, East and West" (ibid., p. 16) in the form of a narrated dialogue between Descartes and Buddha. Kojève describes an episode in a library where he fell asleep and dreamt that a "portrait of Descartes" and a "bronze statue of Buddha" arose from their inanimate states in order to debate the first principles of philosophy. The stakes of the discussion were of a metaphysical order—Western Judeo-Christian theism and Eastern Buddhist atheism—and the two were, of course, at loggerheads. Kojève describes a visibly irritated Descartes arguing how philosophy must take as its basic foundation the axiom "*Cogito, ergo sum*." Kojève picks up the discussion at the moment that the Buddha is set to challenge this philosophical point of departure. According to Buddha, Descartes "attempts to prove the reality of the 'I', a thinking entity, out of the position: there is reality, existence. Therefore, the assertion 'Cogito ergo sum' is no axiom but is itself

in need of such a premise as the one above" (ibid., p. 17). The Buddha thus claims that Descartes is unable to grasp the antithesis between existence and inexistence in a sufficiently radical way.

The argument is presented in a complicated manner. It is certainly difficult to follow the Buddha's logic—a frustration that is expressed repeatedly by his interlocutor. And yet, Kojève's intention is clear. His dialogue seeks to highlight what he understands to be the insufficiency of a philosophical foundation that is unable to circumscribe the horizonal inexistent. The Buddha suggests that instead of taking as our philosophical point of departure the reciprocity of thought and Being, we take a step back to interrogate the possibility of thought as such: "the very possibility of thinking thought shows the necessity of understanding the inexistent as thought itself" (ibid., p. 19). Just as Kojève suggested in the entry on the limitations of thought, the Buddha is here putting forward the idea that thinking itself, detached from that which is thought, marks off a horizon that separates the inexistent from existence. Frustrated with this seemingly sophistical reasoning, Descartes exhorts the Buddha to explain how he has arrived at his conclusion. However, just as the Buddha begins to respond, he is interrupted midstream by a falling stack of books that awakens Kojève from his sleep.

Much can be said about this fascinating dialogue. Of course, the irony that Kojève questions Descartes' *cogito* from within a dream should, of course, not be lost on us. Nor should the way Kojève is awakened from the dream be passed off as a *Deus ex machina* that rescues an inexperienced thinker from a complicated argument. The convoluted and phantasmagorical nature of the conversation should be read as a guide, one that directs us toward the elusive and intangible core that orients the philosophy of the inexistent. The Buddha is silenced by the falling stack of philosophy texts—literal philosophical discourse—the moment he is prompted to speak explicitly about the inexistent. The story serves as an analogy to the methodological difficulty in presenting a philosophy of the inexistent: the very act of speaking of the inexistent

(i.e., pure Being, thought as such) destroys it. The fracturing of the reciprocity of thinking and Being is situated in a discursive abyss. Buddha's silence at the moment of response is, thus, the equivalent of an affirmation of the inexistent as that which escapes all expression. The connection between Kojève's philosophy of the inexistent and silence is not confined to his *PJ*. Owing to its initial point of departure, Kojève's philosophy remains tethered to the problem of silence throughout his corpus. Nowhere is this more clearly evidenced than in *Atheism*, a text which explicitly seeks to develop the principles of the inexistent first laid out in the *PJ*. In one of the most enigmatic passages of his entire corpus, Kojève remarks that "philosophical discourse inevitably distorts philosophy, which ideally is silence" (Kojève, 2018, p. 184). I claim that this line must be understood in relation to the silence of the Buddha, a silence that is revealed in and through a suspension of discourse. Yet, before turning to the *Atheism* text, there is another dimension of the inexistent introduced in the *PJ* that requires our attention as it relates to religion and art.

1.4. Eastern philosophy and the aesthetics of the inexistent

The horizonal element of the inexistent as it is presented in Kojève's early thought resounds with certain features of Jaspers' encompassing; and, just like Jaspers, the difficulty in expressing the inexistent pushed Kojève away from Western philosophy towards the East. This move represents a critical moment in his thinking that will reverberate throughout the rest of his corpus—namely, a philosophy that meets at the juncture of the West and East, with Kojève, the *Russian* philosopher, acting as a point of intersection, the fracture, operating between the two.[39] Commentators have only recently taken notice of the relevance of Eastern philosophy,

[39] For more on the political dimension of the East/West conflict in Kojève's writings, see chapter 3.

especially Buddhism, to Kojève's philosophy.[40] In 1927, Kojève wrote a text on *L'enseignement bouddhique du karma* [The Buddhist Teaching of Karma], where he explores free action from the perspective of Buddhism but with an eye to the differences it has with its Western philosophical counterpart (Kojève, 2022).[41] As I will discuss in chapter 2, this confrontation is continued in his 1931 text on *Atheism* where his concept of atheism leans heavily on ideas drawn from Buddhism—what he calls the only true atheistic religion. And this idea of an ostensibly contradictory "religious atheism" is contrasted with the theism at work in Kant, which Kojève explores in his post-war manuscript *Kant*, an important text that I will return to in chapter 4. This entire strand of thought stems from the period between 1921 and 1925, when Kojève devoted considerable time and effort to the study of Eastern philosophy, religion, and languages.

The first mention of Eastern philosophy and religion in the *PJ* is made in reference to Hermann Beckh's 1916 text on *Buddhismus: Buddha und seine Lehre*. It is likely that Kojève encountered Beckh, and this book, through his relationship with Karl Jaspers who, in his 1919 *Psychologie Der Weltanschauungen* [Psychology of Worldviews], refers to the German orientalist. Kojève says he is drawn to a certain passage in Beckh's text that deals with the Buddhist prohibition against using false language. He argues that "based on this text, it can be argued without fear of denial that Buddhism will never know the conflict between truth and

[40] Weslati argues that the influence of Eastern philosophy has been grossly neglected in scholarship on Kojève and that his later work on Kant and Hegel is informed just as much by the German philosophical tradition as it is by Buddhism. In this vein, she also hints at how elements of the *Philosopher's Journal* contain the outlines of the principles of his later ontology (Weslati, 2017). Even Rutkevich, who is otherwise dismissive of the philosophical contents of the *Journal*, admits that it contains the seeds of the interconnection between Eastern and Western philosophy that will be important for understanding Kojève's later work (Rutkevich, 2015). Boris Groys argues that this interconnection is affirmed in Kojève's reading of Hegel where he presents "not a contemplative, Eastern Buddhism, but a Western, active, working and speaking Buddhism. To commit oneself to emptiness as one's ultimate master means to act in the name of the pure, empty form in the middle of the world that is interested only in natural content" (Groys, 2016, p. 37). For more on Kojève's engagement with Eastern philosophy in general, see, (Love, 2018).

[41] In the preface to the book, the translator, Rambert Nicolas, claims that Kojève's philosophy should be understood as a crossing point and mixing between Europe and Asia.

falsehood, which is very common among us in the West" (Kojève, 2013, p. 9). Although Kojève does not expand on this specific claim, it is indicative of the confrontation between Eastern and Western philosophy that is more broadly traversed in the *PJ*.[42] In this regard, Kojève's relationship with German Indologist Max Walleser is of particular importance.[43]

The first time Walleser's name appears in the *PJ* is in an entry entitled, "On Walleser". There, Kojève makes explicit reference to his 1920 text, *Der ältere Vedanta*, [44] honing in on what he perceives as the specific difference between Western and Eastern philosophy:[45]

> European philosophy analyses exteriority, from which it begins. Understanding the self is therefore based on the clarification of exteriority, considered as given. Consciousness has the task of determining the possibility of experience, and in this sense, it is analysed. This is more evident than ever in Kant. Indian philosophy proceeds exactly in the opposite direction. It tries to analyse interiority *in itself*, considered as a given (Kojève, 2013, p. 132).

In opposition to the Western ("Kantian") approach, which takes the givenness of experience and the exterior world as its point of departure so as to derive an understanding of the subject,

[42] In another entry labelled "The ultimate ends of ethics of Christianity and Buddhism" he expands upon this difference: "Both Christianity and Buddhism place something outside of life, above it, at the ultimate goal of their ethics. The ethics of both is not an end in itself nor is it analyzed as such, but it is only a means, a means to obtain something else." Kojève claims that the ethics of Buddhism and Christianity are very similar. The difference only being that if the Christian seeks to deny temporal existence for the sake of eternal reconciliation with absolute Being, then the Buddhist denies this same temporal existence to achieve absolute non-Being. Furthermore, "as its ultimate goal, Buddhism aims to pull humanity out of the wheel of life, from the circle of an existence that implies an uninterrupted chain of suffering, and identifies the ideal in annihilation, in nirvana. In the Christian conception of the world, being is not synonymous with suffering but, on the contrary, with life, meaning that the temporary deprivation of illusory goods leads to the bliss of eternal existence" (Kojève, 2013, pp. 31-32). It is also interesting to note that Kojève will repeat many of these claims almost three decades later in his *Kant* manuscript (Kojève, 1973).

[43] Not very well known in the English world, Walleser was professor and founder of the Institute for Buddhist Studies (today known as the Institute for South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies) in Heidelberg when Kojève arrived in the early 1920s. For more on the relation between Kojève and Walleser, see (Filoni, 2021, p. 109).

[44] M. von Walleser, *Der ältere Vedānta, Geschichte, Kritik und Lehre*, Heidelberg, 1910. This text deals with the teachings of Shankara, regarded as one of the most important thinkers in Indian philosophy. During the 8th century, Shankara was instrumental in the resurgence of Hinduism against the backdrop of Buddhism and Jainism's waning influence. For more on this, see (Whaling, 1979).

[45] Although Kojève's later work will focus mainly on Buddhism, in the *PJ*, Kojève seems to employ examples from both Hinduism and Buddhism in opposition to so-called "Western" philosophy.

Eastern philosophy tends to proceed in the opposite direction, from the inner to the exterior world. Echoing G.K. Chesterton, who writes that "the Buddhist is looking with a peculiar intentness inwards [while] the Christian is staring with a frantic intentness outwards" (Chesterton, 1995, p. 138), Kojève's remarks seek to highlight the opposition between Western philosophy's attentiveness to the explanation of objective reality and Eastern philosophy's rejection of this reality as mere illusion. He bases his account on the Buddhist doctrine of *Śūnyavāda*. This doctrine supports the idea of the emptiness, or *śūnya*, of the phenomenal world, as well as of every concept, including that of emptiness itself. The most recognisable exponent of this way of thinking was the second century Mādhyamika Buddhist, Nāgārjuna, a figure that will be instrumental in Kojève's later analysis of Buddhism as an atheistic religion.

The conception of emptiness and nothingness in the context of Buddhist thought are only touched upon in the *PJ*. They are mostly scattered reflections that do not begin to take shape until the later 1920s and early 1930s.[46] Yet, the place where we find the contrast between Western and Eastern philosophy—the tension between externality and internality—as it relates to inexistence played out most prominently in the *PJ* is not in his fragments on religion or meontology but, rather, in sections dedicated to aesthetics. Many of the ideas on aesthetics presented in the *PJ* will develop and find their full expression in the mid-1930s in a collection of essays and other writings on the work of his uncle Wassily Kandinsky.[47] What is interesting, however, is that the ideas animating his later philosophy of art were prompted by a demand to better understand the murky waters of the inexistent.

Kojève tells us that he was led toward an aesthetic consideration of the inexistent following a short trip to Rome in the summer of 1920. During his stay, he visited the Vatican

[46] Roberto Esposito references this connection claiming that "fragments" in Kojève's *PJ* show that the problem of inexistence as it relates to religious atheism and Buddhism can be traced back to an interest in the meonism of Nikolai Minsky (Esposito, 2019, p. 58).

[47] For an overview of these writings, see (Florman, 2014).

Museum (three times!), the Forum, Piazza di Spagna, and the Villa Borghese, amongst others. This tour, especially his visit to the Galleria Borghese, certainly proved inspiring:

> How much art around me! Today I went to Villa Borghese. It rarely happens to see so many beautiful paintings. One aroused a very strong impression in me. It is a canvas from the school of Leonardo that depicts a Madonna nursing the baby Jesus. Everything is beautiful on the painting: the Mona Lisa smile, the unripe breasts, the baby. The shapes are also beautiful, and the colours as well. I bought a reproduction and, once home, I admired it for a long time. But strangely, although it is well done, something is always missing. It does not feel old, you cannot feel the hand of the painter (Kojève, 2013, p. 37).[48]

Here we find traces of what will become a familiar critique of mechanical reproduction in art made famous in Walter Benjamin's 1935 essay. The act of reproducing a work of art steals something essential from it, the very "thing" that makes it what it is and gives it its particularity. Benjamin calls this the artwork's "aura"—that is, its "presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (Benjamin, 2007, p. 220). Similarly, Kojève maintains that the aesthetic experience obtained through an immediate encounter with an original work of art is lost in a reproduction. Like Benjamin, Kojève tells us that a mechanical facsimile lacks that which gives the artwork its historical or material authenticity, as well as the "feeling" one experiences in the presence of the work.

Yet, taking a slightly different direction than what we find in Benjamin, Kojève argues that what is essential in art is not any specific authenticity or "aura". Rather, in an entry that builds upon his initial aesthetic reflections entitled "On the Inexistent in Art and the Art of the Inexistent", he hones in on what he considers to be a more fundamental *lack* in the artwork. For Kojève, it is not "the word, sound, form, colour, movement, or even smell or taste" of the

[48] Filoni points out that the painting Kojève is referring to is not the Mona Lisa but most likely the *Madonna col Bambino e San Giovannino* by Domenico Beccafumi which would have been present at that time in the Galleria Borghese.

artwork that is essential. All of these things are "only instruments of expression. In fact, the less one notices the material and the medium, the more one confronts the *pure idea*, the more sublime is the creation of the artist" (Kojève, 2013, p. 37). Kojève once again makes reference to a "pure idea", a pure thought that is without an object. In this vein, Kojève claims that "what has value only in art, what distinguishes it from other creations of human thought, is the element of the inexistent, of the unthinkable, or rather, the sensorial apprehension of the pure idea" (ibid.). Inverting Benjamin to some degree, Kojève elevates what is absent in the work of art into its constitutive element. Indeed, what are normally considered as the fundamental features contained in an aesthetic experience—the word in poetry, the sound in music, and the paint on the canvas—must be abstracted so as to peel back the layers and expose what is hidden, that which "does not exist in the canvas, but is rather perceived as the inexistent that is lurking behind the real creation" (ibid.). Just like the pure thought that remains detached from its object (or vice versa), the aesthetic "pure idea" emerges within a dissolution of the canvas, revealed at the horizon where existence passes over into inexistence.

Despite Kojève's criticisms of Western philosophy, we see here that his description of the "pure idea" displays certain affinities with Kant's description of the aesthetic idea. This influence can perhaps be traced to the period between 1921 and 1924 when Kojève studied under the neo-Kantian Heinrich Maier.[49] Maier's name appears frequently in the final sections of the *PJ* when Kojève speaks about Kant and, more specifically, the *Critique of Judgment* (ibid., p. 141). Kojève's notion of the aesthetic idea in many ways repeats Kant's own description as a counterpart (*Gegenstück*, which Kant refers to as a "pendant") of an idea of reason: "a representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it

[49] As Filoni reports, Kojève attended two courses on Kant taught by Maier in Heidelberg in 1921 and 1922 which covered "Freedom and Necessity [*Freiheit und Notwendigkeit*]" and "Introduction to epistemology and metaphysics [*Einführung in die Erkenntnistheorie und Metaphysik*]", respectively. When Maier relocated to Berlin in 1923, Kojève followed him and attended his course on "Kant and philosophy: from Kant to the present [*Kant und die Philosophie: von Kant bis zur Gegenwart*]" (Filoni, 2013, p. 130).

being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., concept, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible" (Kant, 2001, p. 192). Indeed, as we have just seen, Kojève relates the aesthetic idea to a feeling of the sublime. For Kant, the difference between beauty and the sublime is one of limit (*Grenze*): "the beautiful in nature concerns the form of the object [*Gegenstandes*], which consists in limitation [*Begrenzung*]; the sublime, by contrast, is to be found in a formless object [*Gegenstande*] insofar as limitlessness [*Unbegrenztheit*] is represented in it" (ibid., 128). In a way that resonates with Kant's (dynamical) sublime, the pure idea in Kojève seeks to capture that which exceeds the *Grenzen* of nature by gesturing toward not only a formless object but, rather, to a pure absence—the inexistent.

Kojève provides an example in an untitled entry of the *PJ*. Reflecting on the archetypal masterpiece of the Italian Renaissance, Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, Kojève considers a few questions. What is it in that face that is so captivating? What is it about the subject's enigmatic expression that sets it apart from similarly fashioned portraits? The answer, according to Kojève, can only be found if we look past anything objective in the painting and toward what is *not* present in the canvas at all:

> There is a peculiar morbidity, a strangeness, that sometimes borders on ferocity enclosed in the contrast between what is expressed between the lower portion and the upper part of the face (i.e., the forehead, the eyebrows, the eyes, etc.). The eyes bear no trace of passion, nor of suffering, doubt, joy or pain. Hers are not even the eyes of an intelligent woman. With their crystalline purity, with their non-depth—or rather with the absence of even a hidden background of human psychology—, with their expression that expresses everything, understands everything and speaks about everything, or—which is the same thing—with their being-beyond-expressiveness, with their reflection of what goes beyond form. With their absolute silence, those eyes are not human eyes, but divine eyes, they are the eyes of eternity, they are the gaze of the inexistent (Kojève, 2013, p. 84).

Kojève reflects on the contrast between the portrait as a whole and the famous *sorriso della Gioconda*. Yet, surprisingly, it is not the smile that grabs Kojève's attention. The incongruity between the upper and lower parts of the face are described as morbid, strange, even ferocious. Whereas other commentators have described the smile as mysterious, enigmatic, and beautiful, Kojève suggests that these features are not the consequence of the form or content of the smile. Although the viewer's gaze is inevitably drawn to the lower part of the canvas, it is the emptiness that emanates from the eyes that are the focal point for Kojève. The eyes of the Mona Lisa are described as the site of a pure lack: void of passion, suffering, doubt, joy or pain. Having this singular attribute of utter and complete deprivation, nothing is revealed but absolute silence. Once again, Kojève probes the limits of the existent, not to transcend them or to reveal some higher synthesis, but to reveal a fracture, the presence of what is absent. And, just as in the dialogue with Descartes and Buddha, the inexistent in the work of art is situated on the horizon of thought, discourse and existence: the site of an inexpressible silence, the sound of inexistence.

The expression "presence of absence" will become a theme in his later reading of Hegel, where Kojève uses the phrase to describe the human being *qua* desire. However, as we will see, it is an expression that will gain its full meaning only through a detour through Heidegger; a detour that is instrumental in Kojève's formulation of the human being itself as the site of the inexpressible—a kind of silence akin to what Heidegger will later call the "peal of stillness" (Heideger, 2001, p. 205). Nevertheless, we would do well to avoid jumping straight into a conversation with his famous seminars since this way of approaching the inexistent is already partially present in his 1931 text on *Atheism*. [50] In this text, Kojève cultivates many of the

[50] Kojève also returns to the problem of aesthetic inexistent in 1936, halfway through his lectures on Hegel in the essay "The Concrete Paintings of Kandinsky". There he argues that non-representational art provides the archetypal mode of the inexistent in art. Kojève contends that Kandinsky invents a new kind of artistic expression that "creates out of nothing—as God creates the Universe: in each of his tableaux he creates a concrete and

embryonic ideas that I have been engaging in the context of the *PJ* as an attempt to establish what he calls an "atheistic system" of philosophy. More specifically, in further developing his nascent thinking of inexistence in and through a juxtaposition with Western conceptions of negative theology, the tension between discourse and silence begins to emerge as a central problematic. Thus, expanding upon his initial philosophical reflections with a view toward the formation of a system, I will show how the inexpressibility of the inexistent emerges as one of the core principles in the development of Kojève's philosophy.

objective universe, which is created *ex nihilo*, since it did not exist before and was not extracted from anything, and which is complete in itself and unique, since it does not exist apart from itself" (Kojève, 2014c, p. 165).

Chapter 2: A Path Towards an Atheistic "System"

2.1. Introduction: From inexistence to atheism

In the first chapter of this thesis, I explored the tentative beginnings of Kojève's philosophy of the inexistent as described in his *PJ*. The philosophical ideas at work in the early 1920s were suspended in a state of germination and would incubate for nearly a decade before forming the roots of what he would refer to as a "system of atheistic philosophy". In 1931, Kojève wrote a pivotal—albeit, once again, *unpublished*— text, *Atheism*, in which he sought to build on the philosophical program only outlined in the *PJ*.[51] The text appears at a crucial junction of Kojève's thinking: Following his first foray into the "philosophy of the inexistent" but before his (in)famous reading of Hegel, this manuscript occupies a precarious place in his corpus. Firstly, it is not immediately clear why Kojève decided to rebrand his philosophy of the inexistent an "atheistic" philosophy, nor, based on the unstable ground of the inexistent, how such a philosophy could aspire to the title of a system. Secondly, and more important for my investigation, is the question of how the fundamental principles of the inexistent cross-over and bleed into this later work, and what the consequences of this are.

Despite the importance Kojève gives to the term "atheism" throughout his corpus, its exact meaning remains slippery and hard to pin down. Much like the "inexistent", the term "atheism" almost seems to defy definition in Kojève's writings. This evasiveness is evidenced in and through a preoccupation with problematizing more commonplace notions of atheism rather than offering up a new definition to replace them. For instance, the positivist conception which maintains that atheism amounts to nothing more than an obvious (and, indeed, banal)

[51] Although the original manuscript was written in Russian (in the summer and fall of 1931 in Paris), *L'Athéisme* was first published in 1998 as a French translation (Kojève, 1999). The first Russian edition appeared in 2007 edited by A. M. Rutkevich (Kojève, 2007). These were followed by an Italian and English translation by Claudia Zonghetti in 2008 and Jeff Love in 2018, respectively. While I consult all translations, unless otherwise stated, I quote from the English translation.

refusal to partake in religious thinking is rejected by Kojève. In fact, he prefaces his investigation into the essence of atheism with a clear rebuke of this naïve understanding, arguing that the "term 'atheism' cannot be understood simply as ignorance of the religious problem as such, i.e., the rejection of anything departing from what is given by the senses" and that if atheism is simply define as the denial of God, then this is inadequate (Kojève, 2018, p. 1). After all, what kind of God are we denying and what kind of denial is involved in a negation of God?

As I will show, much of Kojève's investigation of atheism runs parallel with ideas that we find in the early Heidegger. Indeed, *Atheism* harbours explicit references to *BT* and the 1929 essay "What is metaphysics?", which both tarry with the question of the meaning of Being (*Sein*) while orbiting around the problem of Nothing (*Nichts*) or nothingness. Clearly with an eye on both of these texts, Kojève offers a tweak by transposing Heidegger's ontological-existential analysis onto a religious terrain. Whereas Heidegger dissects the ontic-ontological difference between the somethingness of beings (*Seiendes*) and the nothingness of Being (*Sein*), Kojève instead interrogates the difference between the somethingness of theistic existence and the nothingness of atheistic inexistence.[52] For Kojève, the atheist is faced with a problem that is not at all foreign to theism (the problem of grasping what is other to or beyond spatio-temporal existence).[53] While the theist believes that "something" exists beyond our phenomenal world of experience, the atheist says that there is nothing. Yet far from eradicating

[52] While Heidegger does not address the relationship between nothingness and atheism directly, he does reference the biblical doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* while initiating a dialogue between "the Nothing" and theology (Heidegger, 1998, p. 94).

[53] Complicating Kojève's attempt to situate atheism is the divide in recent scholarship as to the role religion plays in Kojève's philosophy as such. On the one side, Hager Weslati has argued that "readings of the [*Atheism*] manuscript as religious philosophy […] do not hold" (Weslati, 2019, p. 223). Marco Filoni, on the other hand, has maintained that beginning with *Atheism*, Kojève's atheistic philosophy is motivated by a "literal obsession with God" (Filoni, 2013, p. xi). As Roberto Esposito has pointed out, "Kojève is perfectly aware of the fact that pushing God into nothingness does not efface him but, on the contrary, affirms him. This is where the atheist's paradoxical situation arises from: even when one negates God, he remains on the religious horizon" (Esposito, 2019, p. 58).

the limit that separates the world from what is wholly other, the atheistic expression "God does not exist" or "God is dead" heightens this difference, forcing us to ask: what do we mean by "nothing" or, indeed, "inexistence"? Moving across various historical examples of negative theology (e.g., St. Augustine, Eriugena, and Meister Eckhart), Kojève draws us into a web that obfuscates the ostensible differences between theistic existence and atheistic inexistence.

Similar to what we explored in the *PJ*, where we encountered a discursive injunction on speaking the inexistent, which pointed the way toward a Kantian inspired aesthetic experience of inexistence, in *Atheism*, Kojève argues that the "either/or" choice between theism and atheism opens up onto a phenomenological terrain. Drawing from Heidegger, Kojève contends that a decision between theism and atheism ultimately depends on an interpretation of the givenness of death. Particularly important for this investigation is Heidegger's "Being towards the end" (*Sein zum Ende*), understood ontologically as "the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 307).[54] In this context, I explore Kojève's controversial and, as I argue, misunderstood idea of freedom expressed in the act of suicide. Against the backdrop of and counter to recent interpretations, I argue that the originality of Kojève's interpretation of death and suicide stems not from a nihilistic denial of worldly existence but rather from an idea of an act of freedom expressed (paradoxically) only in its non-actualisation—that is, an "action" that remains purely potential—or, as Kojève puts it, a givenness of what is not given. In doing so, I pave the way not only for an analysis of the role of death in Kojève's reading of Hegel but, more importantly, I begin to show how these ideas are related to Kojève's problematic analysis of the "complete" and "closed" Hegelian system and its connection with the "end" of history.

[54] In this way, I take a similar point of departure as Dominique Pirotte, who claims that Kojève's *Atheism* works on "the basis of a phenomenological method that he inherits from the Heideggerian analyses of the *Dasein*, of the 'being-before-death'" (Pirotte, 2005, p. 32).

2.2. The Second *brouillon*: Kojève's atheism

When reading Kojève's *Atheism*, we are reminded of Herder's dictum which states that "the first, uninhibited work of an author is therefore usually his best; his bloom is unfolding, his soul still dawn. Much with him is still full, unmeasured sensation that later becomes pondering or mature thought which has already lost its youthful rosiness" (Herder, 2002, p. 219). While I argued in the first chapter that the *PJ* harbours the seeds that will grow into Kojève's later philosophy, it is only in *Atheism* that these seeds start to blossom. For the ideas planted in the early 1920s begin to germinate almost a decade later; problems merely outlined in the *PJ* begin to find firm footing and expression in *Atheism*. But this is not to say that the so-called "philosophy of the inexistent" reaches maturity at this stage. Despite the ostensible intention of presenting a complete "system of philosophy", this text is presented as a fragment.

Just like the *PJ*, we receive *Atheism* in a state of incompletion—it is an unfinished draft, a *brouillon*—that Kojève is, once again, reluctant to publish: "What I am writing here, strictly speaking, is only a sketch of my philosophy and thus it is also not final, nor can it be published" (Kojève, 2018, p. 187). I have discussed the reasons for my refusal to honour the author's demand in the first chapter. I repeat what I have already said there: The value of Kojève's early texts is to be found not in their completion but rather precisely in their rudimentary form; they are valuable *because* they are incomplete. Although I will approach all Kojève's texts as drafts, each depicting a different stage of his philosophical development, *Atheism* represents an important juncture in his thinking. It is another example of a text that provides an opportunity to capture what is all too rare in philosophy: the thought of the philosopher midstream. It is with this draft that we continue to trace the red thread that was already laid down in the *PJ* with an eye toward his later thought.[55]

[55] In his well-rounded summary of Kojève's corpus, Nichols Jr. argues that even though "Kojève wrote the statement that it is unfinished and therefore should not be published; it is nonetheless of considerable interest as an expression of his philosophic inquiries prior to his becoming the Hegelian for which he is chiefly known"

As expected of an unfinished draft, *Atheism* is populated with extensive notes and ruminations that sprawl and, indeed, exceed the length of the main body. These notes sometimes build on the core argument, but they also lead the reader down unexpected paths. In one of these footnotes, Kojève argues that an investigation into the difference between atheism and theism is "the very starting point and material of philosophy itself" (Kojève, 2018, p. 69). Yet in another, he affirms the provisional nature of his analysis: "To be sure, this book is only a draft of my fantasy that does not resolve the question about atheism" (Kojève, 2018, p. 193). Is this fantasy the same as the one dreamt in the Warsaw library, the phantasmagorical dialogue between West and East, Descartes and Buddha? This we cannot say for sure. But what we can say is that hesitations found in the *PJ* also persist throughout *Atheism*; Kojève is obviously still grappling with a problem rather than offering any definitive conclusions. Yet, as I argued in the previous chapter, this indecisiveness is not the consequence of a lack of philosophical rigour; rather, it introduces a problem of a more general theoretical order. Kojève is not yet the thinker of the "end"; he has not yet delivered his lectures on Hegel, nor has he made any definitive claims regarding a complete system of knowledge. It is true, in *Atheism*, there is at least the *goal* of providing an atheistic system of philosophy; however, he also raises the possibility of whether such completion is possible at all (ibid.). Going even further, in one of the final notes appended to the manuscript, Kojève seems to question even the desirability of completion by suggesting that those philosophers who manage to find satisfaction in the construction of a completed system are not only "bad philosophers" but also "bad people" that are "not interesting" (ibid., p. 188). Yet, only a few years after penning *Atheism*, Kojève

(Nichols, 2007, p. 14). Wilson is more specific in his claim that there is a link between *Atheism* and Kojève's later "end of history" thesis and concept of the "homogenous State" (Wilson, 2019b, pp. 91-92). For Geroulanos, *Atheism* is fundamental to Kojève's attempt to establish "a new philosophical system that reaches beyond existing ontology" (Geroulanos, 2010, p. 137). Finally, Weslati claims that "in *Atheism*, the theist-atheist dialectic initiated Kojève's reflection on a systematic articulation between ontology and phenomenology" (Weslati, 2019, p. 224).

contends that Hegelian philosophy not only opens the door towards a complete system of philosophy but acts as its definitive closure. How are we to understand this incongruity?

One strategy that has been used to skirt around some of the seemingly incompatible claims between *Atheism* and the *IRH* has been to suggest that there is a kind of structural break in Kojève's corpus, one which divides his work into a pre- and post-Hegelian periodisation. At first glance, there does appear to be something to this position. Indeed, whenever Kojève references Hegel in *Atheism*—which is rarely—it takes the form of a denunciation. For instance, in a footnote attached to a key section where Kojève is discussing the relation between negation and nothing, Kojève offers a rejoinder to the opening passage of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, arguing against the idea that there can be a "transition" between being and nothingness that results in becoming (ibid., p. 135). In another footnote he adds to this criticism: "In his *Logic* or, even earlier, in his *Phenomenology* […] Hegel often ends up with a 'deduction' in the sense of an abstract construction, and he often incorrectly understands the point of what he is doing. This is a dangerous comment: *Hegel hat sich missverstanden* [Hegel misunderstood himself]!!" (ibid., 164). At the same time, Kojève does not provide any specifics regarding this "misunderstanding", nor does he discuss his criticism of Hegel in more detail in this text. Whatever this misunderstanding may have been, however, Kojève seems to have forgotten (or perhaps forgiven?) it by the time he delivered his lectures on the *PhS*, in which he openly defends its completion and systematicity.

All of this has led some to question Kojève's familiarity with Hegel and Hegelianism when he was writing *Atheism*. It was, in fact, around the same time that he enrolled in Alexandre Koyré's seminars on Hegel that he began penning this manuscript. Yet, after only two years, Kojève himself would take over the post as lecturer after Koyré left Paris for Cairo. Those who insist on his inexperience point to a passage written in 1956 in the Preface to *The Concept, Time, and Discourse* (*CTD*), where Kojève wrote that before beginning to lecture on

Hegel he had only "read [the *Phenomenology*] three times from end to end without understanding anything" (Kojève, 2019, p. 3). Despite this confession, it is difficult to look past the enormous influence his interpretation had on his students. How is it that such an inexperienced thinker achieved such success? Two years is not a long time to master Hegel, not at the level that Kojève achieved. In fact, if we look more closely at his supposed incomprehension of the *Phenomenology* before 1931, we see that his disclosure has perhaps itself been misunderstood. In order not to misconstrue his statement, we must understand the context in which it was made. What has been passed over (perhaps strategically) is the explanation which immediately follows his self-criticism: "It appears to me, retrospectively, that it is impossible to understand Hegel in the strict sense of the word [without] interpreting not only each sentence written by him but even each word that he uses" (ibid.). For Kojève, not understanding *everything* in Hegel is equivalent to understanding *nothing*. Consequently, rather than a profession of ignorance, Kojève's "admission" amounts to a declaration of the difficulty (even impossibility) in achieving a complete understanding of "everything" in Hegel. Moreover, as I will discuss in chapters 4 and 5, this lack (or, even better, *gap*) in his understanding, leads Kojève to undertake a mammoth post-war project of "updating" the Hegelian "system of knowledge"—one that, as we will see, itself remains only an incomplete *attempt*. Not only does Kojève's "admission" not imply ignorance, what it in fact alludes to is an unsatisfied desire for philosophical completion.

Readers of Kojève have been guided by the perception that completion is a solution to a problem rather than the problem itself. It is my contention that Kojève's endeavour to present a *complete* system (is there any other kind?) is something that is always in abeyance—a potentiality that lacks actuality. Although I will point to a series of examples to support this

claim, it is in *Atheism* that this problem first begins to take shape.[56] With that said, while certain elements of *Atheism* serve as a propaedeutic to *the IRH*, we should resist reading this manuscript as a dress rehearsal for the Hegelian play. It is a text that demands to be read on its own terms and have its own stage.

Reading like a steady stream of consciousness, *Atheism* can only be described as a *block* of text. There is no attempt made to divide the text into sections or chapters; there isn't as much as a single break in the 124-page manuscript. Although he occasionally mentions other authors, he does not cite his sources with any regularity such that the references at work in the text remain largely implicit. Bearing this in mind, we can pin down some of the more obvious philosophical domains that the essay orbits. Even though the name "Kant" is written only a handful of times, the influence permeates the arguments in a general way serving as a backdrop for the entire discussion. This is unsurprising given that Kojève had spent the better part of the 1920s living in Germany and studying under some of the most influential neo-Kantian philosophers of the time. The long shadows that Karl Jaspers and Heinrich Rickert cast over early 20th-century German philosophy did not fail to affect Kojève.[57] Indeed, the concept of freedom, the central axis on which the latter half of *Atheism* turns, is unmistakeably Kantian in spirit. With that said, Kojève also participates in more contemporary debates of German philosophy.[58] As has been pointed out by commentators, *Atheism* explicitly engages the

[56] The most cited example of this is the so-called "universal and homogeneous state "that arrives at the "end of history". Beginning with Fukuyama, scholars have used Kojève to argue for the inevitability of a depoliticised, liberal world order. In chapter 3, I will argue against this reading, claiming that Kojève's correspondence with Carl Schmitt demonstrates a hesitancy that oscillates between a closed and open circle of history.

[57] For more on this connection, see chapter 1.

[58] The essay also tilts toward a post-Kantian angle that is cast with a Fichtean tint. This is perhaps not entirely surprising in an essay devoted to atheism. While the atheism dispute (*Atheismusstreit*) is nowhere mentioned explicitly, there are several overt references to Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* throughout the text. Most notably, Kojève appeals to the interaction between an "I" and "not-I". For more on the connection between Kojève's *Atheism* and Fichte, see (Love, 2018b).

phenomenology of Husserl and, even more importantly, with the early Heidegger.[59] Heidegger's name appears many times throughout the text, mostly in the notes and reminders to "compare with something in Heidegger". As mentioned, Kojève explicitly engages with *BT* and "What is Metaphysics?" as he tries to sort through the difficulties of distinguishing between theistic "somethingness" and atheistic "nothingness". In this context, what connects the two thinkers is a preoccupation with the relation between negation and nothingness. Whereas for Heidegger, the difference between nothingness and negation has ontological significance, for Kojève the same question is framed within a religious dimension.[60]

With the aim of circumscribing atheism as a problem, Kojève asks: what allows one to distinguish between the God of negative theology and the Nothing of atheism? To answer this question, Kojève draws simultaneously on Eastern philosophy (specifically Buddhism and the thought of Nāgārjuna) alongside Western mystics and theologians (e.g., Meister Eckhart, but also Augustine and Eriugena) to present a commonality that spills over into a radical polarity between "Eastern" atheism and "Western" apophatism. Kojève contends that atheism maintains a religious function—a *religō* not between the *saeculum* and *caelum* but rather between *Welt* and *Nicht*—that complicates positivistic conceptions. Thus, in order to adequately differentiate atheism from theism, an interrogation of the nothing is required that does not simply renounce it as meaningless. To be sure, Kojève is uninterested in confronting religion from any institutional or dogmatic perspective. Rather, he claims that a "broader definition" of religion is required to accommodate the concept of atheism. Important for this

[59] In the context of phenomenology, Jeff Love says that when terms such as "givennness" (*dannost*), interaction (*vzaimodeistvie*), and homogeneity (*odnorodnost'*) are employed, it is likely that Kojève is drawing from Husserl (Love, 2018b, p. xxxi). The connection to Heidegger is obvious throughout the text, as is acknowledged by many commentators including (Pirotte, 2005, pp. 31-54) , (Geroulanos, 2010, pp. 136-141), (Esposito, 2019, pp. 57-67), (Filoni, 2020) and (Weslati, 2019). While Pirotte, Geroulanos and Esposito each attempt (in different ways) to draw out connections with Heidegger, Filoni and Weslati try to downplay this link.

[60] As Roberto Esposito points out, "Kojève's 1931 treatise on atheism is an essay on negation that does not stray far afield from Heidegger's *What Is Metaphysics?* —with which it explicitly engages. Of course, the topics and philosophical aims of the two works are quite different" (Esposito, 2019, p. 57).

discussion are other contemporary scholars of religion, most notably Emile Durkheim. As I will now show, Durkheim provides the theoretical context in which Kojève begins to describe the possibility of religious atheism.

2.3. Sacred and the Shadow

Although it has been subjected to all kinds of interpretations, Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God announced that, in one way or another, the belief in the Christian God had become unbelievable. His proclamation certainly did not come as a shock. It was an idea that had infused Europe and, indeed, many parts of the world as the end of the 19th century approached. The religious foundations that had structured the European moral, political, and even epistemological order had been questioned, disturbed, and fractured, leaving these systems and institutions irredeemably damaged and in the process of decay. Nevertheless, while the consequences of the enlightenment ended up in a suspension of the need for a divine source and ground for science, society, and state, this did not mean that the demand for a metaphysical foundation had been abolished. As such, when Nietzsche made his famous pronouncement in the *Gay Science* in 1882, he allowed himself a caveat adding a little wink to Plato: "God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown" (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 167). The complete and total annihilation of the divine realm is easier said than done: we have killed God, yet His presence still lingers if only as an absence. A shadow remains even after the chains have been broken and the prisoners have been freed. In what clandestine sub-terrain does this dead God, along with the metaphysics that He orients, find shelter?

One of the ways in which the death of God was felt was in denial; that is to say, in a positivistic conception of the world that feigns ignorance of the problem as such. Dead or alive, God is unable to find a hiding place because, quite simply, there is no place to hide. As has

become custom in the way we use the word "science" today, positivism understands the universe of observable (i.e., sensorial) phenomena to be exhaustive of the entire domain of what can be thought, known, and questioned. As a philosophical movement, positivism gained momentum in the 1920s, most notably within the so-called Vienna Circle (a group that consisted of Moritz Schlick, Rudolph Carnap, Otto Neurath, and Friedrich Waismann, amongst others). What united this group as a school of thought was the "principle of verification": the theory that all statements or propositions must be analytically or empirically verifiable. The scientific, technological, and industrial achievements of the 19th and early 20th centuries had created a new world that both buttressed the claims of positivism and had become the basis for its promotion. Emboldened by these successes, it relied on the methods of empiricism and mathematics to provide the ground and horizon on which to construct a philosophical system. Their disdain for any principle based on the synthetic *a priori* lead to a radical stance that regarded religion and metaphysics as both redundant and deleterious. From within this "scientistic" perspective, metaphysics and religion had become bad words, synonymous with all the superstition and folly that had plagued mankind during its dark ages. Replacing these old and injurious organizing principles, positivism saw itself as championing an ideologically neutral method, capable of banishing all mythical or irrational "shadows", and alone qualified to pull humanity out of the cave. Gaps in our knowledge would no longer be filled with fanciful notions of transcendence but would find expression only in observable facts, both verifiable and repeatable. Any statement or proposition falling outside of this method of verification would henceforth not only be deemed unknowable but lacking any meaning whatsoever.[61] Of course, this included any religious propositions concerning the existence or inexistence of God;

[61] As A.J. Ayer, one of the prominent English supports of logical positivism writes, "as tautologies and empirical hypotheses form the entire class of significant propositions, we are justified in concluding that all metaphysical assertions are nonsensical" (Ayer, 1952, p. 41).

because such statements could not be demonstrated analytically or empirically, they were considered utterly unintelligible.

Yet, as we saw in the Introduction to this chapter, Kojève set out to challenge this framework.[62] In the opening paragraph of *Atheism*, he contends that "if by the term 'atheism' we understand simply ignorance of the religious problem as such, the rejection of anything departing from what is given by the senses, then the verbal combination, "atheistic religion," will seem absurd and nonsensical" (Kojève, 2018, p. 1). However, the idea that atheism is divorced from religion is naïve, a kind of atheism that exists only for "animals, vegetables, or the inorganic" (ibid.). Instead, in order to understand atheism, it is the concept of religion that needs to be properly understood: "if by atheism we understand the denial of God, as is usually the case, then the concept 'atheistic religion' can make sense, provided we understand religion broadly enough" (ibid.). This particular element of Kojève's thinking dovetails with the sociological analysis of religion found in Emile Durkheim's *Les forms élémentaires de la vie religieuse*. Although Kojève is critical of some of Durkheim's conclusions, this text offers a valuable point of entry into the way that Kojève wants to think the idea of religious atheism.

In direct opposition to the positivists, Durkheim asserts that religion "is a fundamental and permanent aspect of humanity" (Durkheim, 1995, p. 1). This, of course, is not to say that religious *institutions* are necessary for human survival, but rather that there is something about our existence that arouses a world of ideas and feelings that are non- or extra-empirical which cannot be ignored. At the same time, what makes Durkheim's approach distinctive, and important in what follows, is that it avoids specific references to Judeo-Christian concepts or

[62] Wilson points out that Kojève was a regular amongst "two highly influential émigré circles in France, both deeply invested in theologically inflected philosophy: the circle surrounding Berdiaev as well as a separate yet affiliated circle of Eurasianists, including Prince Nikolai Trubetskoi, Petr Suvchinskii, and Lev Karsavin" (Wilson, 2019b, p. 32). He argues that the ideas promoted within these groups, specifically in relation to Russian religious philosophy and the response to the fin-de-siècle crisis of positivism, were also a key contributor to Kojève's own thinking on the topic of atheism.

the supernatural in general. Rather, he frames his conception of religion with three fundamental constitutive elements: a set of beliefs and practices, a moral community, and sacred objects. Although all three elements are necessary to form a cohesive religious bond, it is only the last of these three that interest us here. What is interesting about the sacred object—the *sine qua non* of Durkheim's concept of religion—is the character that defines it. The sacred object obtains its uniqueness not by any specific quality but, instead, precisely by its lack of exceptionality: "A rock, a tree, a spring, a pebble, a piece of wood, a house, in a word anything, can be sacred" (Durkheim, 1995, p. 35). Likewise, things that are considered sacred can lose this characteristic. For example, in his 1963 essay on "The Christian Origins of Modern Science", Kojève points out that certain cosmological objects like the moon or stars were once considered sacred and, as such, were understood to reside on a different ontological plane, transcendent with the human world. However, through the development of science, these astrological entities began to take on a worldly character, especially in the eyes of the Christian religions. The fact that the development of science eventually showed that these astrological objects belonged to the same profane realm as man only meant that the gap was pushed elsewhere to the edges of the visible universe and beyond them (Kojève, 1984).

Out of the mundane world of objects, the sacred emerges by introducing a radical heterogeneity, an absolutely irreconcilable difference, with all worldly things. At the same time, the fundamental difference between sacred and profane is in no way hierarchical, i.e., the sacred does not occupy a superior rung on the ladder than the world of profane things: "Subordination of one thing to another is not enough to make one sacred and the other not" (Durkheim, 1995, p. 35). Although the sacred appears to be just another object within the profane world, what distinguishes it is its otherness to this world, a difference that cannot be reduced to a qualitative distinction: "In the history of human thought, there is no other example of two categories of things as profoundly differentiated or as radically opposed to one another"

(ibid., p. 36). An "abyss" separates the sacred and the profane; they are two domains with absolutely nothing in common (ibid., pp. 34, 58). This separation is, for Durkheim, the distinctive trait of all religious thought.

By instigating a dualism between the world and what is non-worldly, the sacred object opens up a gap from within the profane world by offering a pathway to what is completely other. Yet, as mentioned, this pathway does not necessarily lead to the God of Christianity or the supernatural. For Durkheim, the distinction between the sacred and profane is "broader than the idea of gods or spirits and so cannot be defined exclusively in those terms" (ibid., p. 33).[63] He singles out Buddhism as an example of such an *atheistic* religion: "What makes Buddhism a religion is that, in the absence of gods, it accepts the existence of sacred things" (ibid., p. 35).[64] At the same time, Durkheim does not disclose further what the sacred is in Buddhism. Nowhere in *Elementary Forms*, or elsewhere, does Durkheim provide a concrete reason why Buddhism should be considered religious under his definition other than to imply that it possesses traits (beliefs, practices, community) common to other conventional theistic religions.[65] Simply put, what makes Buddhism an atheistic religion is that it maintains a division between the sacred and the profane while refraining from any explicit reference to a deity.

At a glance, Durkheim's definition of religion seems to satisfy Kojève's demand to include atheism. Indeed, in *Atheism* Kojève engages, both implicitly and explicitly, with

[63] As Marco Orrù and Amy Wang argue, "Durkheim relied on his interpretation of Buddhism to support two crucial claims in his definition of religious phenomena: that gods or spirits are not essential to religion, for early Buddhism had no meaningful gods or spirits; and that the sacred-profane dichotomy is characteristic of all religions, since it is central even to an atheistic religion like Buddhism" (Orrù & Wang, 1992).

[64] Durkheim cautions that in some circumstances the Buddha himself has taken on certain divine-like qualities insofar as temples have been constructed in his name and he has been venerated and treated as a kind of sacred object. However, he maintains that such practices, as are sometimes seen in Buddhism, do not rise above those of a "commemorative cult" and such "theistic" forms of Buddhism are isolated and even derivative.

[65] See (Strenski, 2020).

Durkheim's *Elementary Forms* and its claim that God is not essential for the constitution of religious phenomena. But ultimately, despite certain similarities, Kojève does not think that Durkheim offers a broad enough definition of religion. Durkheim's example of Buddhism as an atheistic religion is, for Kojève, inadequate because it understands Buddhism as participating within a dualistic frame that produces a distinction between the sacred and profane: "[Durkheim] allows in his terminology for the possibility of an atheistic religion, but not in my terminology, since for him religion includes the concept of the 'completely other' (*sacré*) than God" (ibid., p. 128). Following Durkheim, Kojève says that *theistic* religion persists whenever there is a difference or gap that divides the phenomenal world of sensory experience from what lies beyond these limits. For the theist, the world appears in some form of opposition to something that is outside of this world. However, what distinguishes atheism from theism is precisely a rejection of anything "outside" of the spatio-temporal world. So long as religion is defined within the horizon of the sacred-profane dichotomy, Kojève argues that the concept of religion remains only applicable to theism and that its extension to include atheism is illegitimate: "Durkheim's *profane* and *sacré*, while considering the [radical difference between the worldly and the 'other'] characteristic for religion and fitting for atheism, grasps the concept of religion too narrowly" (Kojève, 2018, p. 183).[66] The atheist finds common ground with positivism; they agree that the spatio-temporal world exhausts the possibilities of everything there is: "The atheist does not know the division of the given into the world and the 'other'; every something is given to her as a finite and worldly something" (ibid., p. 110). For the theist, that which is beyond this world may be something strange, even

[66] In the 1937-38 lectures on Hegel (not available in the original English translation), Kojève presents a definition of religion that is very similar, both terminologically and stylistically, to what we find in Durkheim: "Religion is born from dualism, from a gap between the ideal and real, that is, between the *idea* that the human makes of himself (*Selbst*) and his conscious life in the empirical world (*Dasein*). As long as this gap subsists, there will always be a tendency to project the ideal *outside* of the World; that is to say, there will always be religion" (Kojève, 2014b, p. 29). However, in this context, Kojève is referring only to theistic religions.

something ungraspable—but it is still *something*. Conversely, for the atheist, there is, very literally, *nothing* beyond the profane world.

This being the case, how can Kojève continue to speak of a religious dimension to atheism? That is, what does "religious" really mean here and is Kojève not simply restating the viewpoint of the logical positivists? Unlike the positivist for whom atheism amounts to an obvious *refusal* to partake in religious thinking, Kojève maintains that the question itself, the question of the givenness of God's existence, is what brings both theism and atheism under a common metaphysical banner. That is to say, "atheism is an answer to the question about God; that is, God is not given to all, but all are given the path to God; the theist, proceeding in this way, finds something, while the atheist finds nothing at all" (Kojève, 2018, p. 135). God may be dead but the cave remains. For the theist, the cave still harbours shadows; but so too for the atheist. What lies in the depths of the atheistic cave is the givenness of nothing, the presence of absence.

2.4. Site of a Stutter: Between discourse and silence

In *Atheism,* Kojève argues that the attempt to draw a border between theism and atheism hinges on explaining how the human being confronts radical alterity. While the theist posits a special "something" that lies beyond all worldly interactions, the atheist says there is nothing. The whole problem for Kojève amounts to distinguishing between this theistic "somethingness" and atheistic "nothingness". What is this nothing that the atheist confronts in the wake of God's supposed death? This question pushes Kojève in the direction of the early Heidegger, more specifically, the latter's engagement with the problem of "the Nothing". As we have seen, in the context of Nietzsche, the pronouncement "God is dead" acts as both a metaphor for the collapse of traditional religious authority and moral truth as well as an announcement of

nihilism brought on by the end of metaphysics (or, to put it more generally, a sign for the loss of meaning). In the essay, "Nietzsche's word: 'God is dead'", Heidegger writes:

> If God—as the super-sensory ground and as the goal of everything that is real—is dead, if the super-sensory world of ideas is bereft of its binding and above all its inspiring and constructive power, then there is nothing left which man can rely on and by which he can orient himself. That is why in the passage we quoted, the question is asked, "Aren't we astray in an endless nothing?" The statement "God is dead" contains the realization that this nothing is spreading (Heidegger, 2002, p. 163).

The attempt to explain the pronouncement of God's death is synonymous with the task of explaining the human being's disorientation in the face of nothingness. In attempting to orient himself to this task, in the late 1920s and early 1930s Heidegger found himself embroiled in a number of influential debates with the Vienna positivists and neo-Kantians. Although his exchanges with Ernst Cassirer have attracted the most attention, in the context of our discussion on atheism, his debate with Rudolf Carnap is more pertinent.[67]

In the summer of 1929 in Davos, Heidegger and Carnap engaged in a series of discussions to do with philosophical foundations. During the course of their exchange, Carnap accused Heidegger of re-establishing metaphysics under a different name; Heidegger countered by arguing that Carnap placed too much faith on a scientific conception of the world causing him to pass over the question of metaphysics altogether. Their confrontation spilled over into a number of articles that they published over the coming years where Carnap will argue that "the nothing" is simply a false problem, and so void of meaning that it can only be posed through its illicit reification—which is precisely what he accuses Heidegger of doing. For

[67] For more on the debate between Heidegger and Cassirer, see (Gordon, 2010). For more on the debate between Heidegger and Carnap, see (Critchley, 2001, pp. 90-110).

Carnap, outside of the interaction between human beings and the world there is simply nothing to consider. In his essay "What is Metaphysics?", Heidegger takes the route of presenting an immanent critique of Carnap's position in order to expose its flaws.[68]

He begins by homing in on the core principle of positivism, arguing that what is "examined are beings (*das Seiende*) only, and besides that—nothing; beings alone, and further—nothing; solely beings, and beyond that—nothing." With the aid of punctuation, Heidegger instigates a provocation. The scientifically rigorous conception of "the nothing to consider", so to speak, which places an epistemological block on accessing anything beyond ontic "beings alone," unintentionally gestures at what it so forcefully denies. Heidegger insists that this gesture, even if it is only to rebuff the nothing, functions as an implicit acknowledgement that should not and cannot be overlooked. That which is concealed by the logical positivists and passed over jumps to the forefront for Heidegger, taking on a position of prominence: "Science wants to know nothing about the nothing. But even so, it is certain that when science tries to express its own proper essence, it calls upon the nothing for help. It has recourse to what it rejects" (Heidegger, 1998, p. 84). The positivist doth protest too much; and through such protestations a question that drives to the core of metaphysics comes into view, a question that Heidegger says needs only to be formulated explicitly: "How is it with the nothing?" (ibid.). When the empiricist claims to investigate entities (*das Seiende*) only and besides that nothing, Heidegger asks if this last utterance is not merely a slip of the tongue: "What about this nothing? Is it an accident that we talk this way so automatically? Is it only a manner of speaking —and nothing besides?" (ibid.). We notice, however, that Heidegger once again employs a strategic use of the hyphen. This time it is placed on the act of enunciation. Is it only a "manner of speaking" when we say there is nothing to say about this or that? Which

[68] This essay was first presented as a lecture at University of Freiburg on July 24, 1929, Heidegger's inaugural address as its new chair of philosophy.

begs the question: how does one speak about nothing purposively? How does one accidentally speak about that which, by definition, there is nothing at all to say? It is precisely when we try to interrogate nothingness, when we try to disclose what remains camouflaged, that "the question deprives itself of its own object" (ibid., p. 85). How can we ask how it *is* with the nothing without turning it into something that *is*? The very question calls itself into question by obscuring the ontological status of what cannot be spoken of. The question, "How is it with the nothing?", is a question that, through its enunciation, conceals what it is meant to reveal. However, the consequence of leaving the nothing camouflaged behind a positivistic veil is, as Heidegger argues, a dogmatism that limits itself to an understanding of the "everyday" world of ontic entities.

Heidegger seeks a deeper engagement arguing that a proper understanding of the nothing requires that its strained relationship with negation be interrogated: "Is the nothing given only because the 'not', i.e., negation, is given? Or is it the other way around? Are negation and the 'not 'given only because the nothing is given?" (Ibid., p. 86). If we understand the nothing as the negation of the totality of all (ontic) entities, then we automatically think nothing under the sign of the negative. For Heidegger, this introduces a problem:

> But with that we bring the nothing under the higher determination of the negative, viewing it, it seems, as the negated. However, according to the reigning and never-challenged doctrine of "logic," negation is a specific act of the intellect. How then can we in our question of the nothing, indeed in the question of its questionability, wish to brush the intellect aside? (ibid.)

If the nothing is reached by negation which (rendered as a logical operation) is an act of the understanding, then that would mean that nothingness would be subordinated to the understanding and would, therefore, be *something* cognised. However, the nothing is precisely that which is not something. Heidegger gets around this by positing the nothing as primary—or, as he says, originary: "the nothing is more originary than the 'not' and negation" (ibid.). Unlike an object of negation, we cannot "know" anything about the nothing. Just as was

discussed in the previous chapter, the nothing—or, as Kojève calls it, the inexistent—is that which operates beyond the horizon of knowledge. If either of these terms can be defined at all, it is only by saying that they evade all conceptualisation—they are dark, abyssal, riddlesome.[69]

Although the philosophical point of departure of *Atheism* is, at a surface level, radically different from what we find in the early Heidegger, it is motivated by a similar drive to take the nothing seriously. In an attempt to demarcate the difference between theism and atheism, Kojève expands on his own philosophy of the inexistent by reconfiguring it with Heidegger's "correct observation" that locates the question of the nothing as "the central problem of metaphysics" (Kojève, 2018, p. 64). Similar to Heidegger, Kojève contends that in going beyond the world of entities toward the abyssal domain of the nothing, discourse reveals its own paradoxicality by stumbling over that which cannot be spoken—a kind of metaphysical stutter:

> When you speak about nothing, *everything* has to be put in brackets because it is impossible to speak about nothing: to speak about nothing means to speak nothing, i.e., not to speak, to be silent. However,—and this is the fundamental paradox of metaphysics—one has to speak, and for this reason one has to use such "metaphysical" expressions (ibid., p. 149).

As a fundamental principle of metaphysics, the nothing is unavoidable. We can wish it away or try to forget it as much as we like but its lingering presence remains. With that said, its presence is masked by its absence; the nothing marks off a place of quiet reticence, what Heidegger will later call the "peal of stillness", where "any uttering, whether in speech or writing, breaks the stillness" (Heideger, 2001, pp. 205-208).[70] Similarly, Kojève claims that

[69] Of course, while Heidegger says that one cannot know the nothing, one can nevertheless experience it through the primordial mood of *Angst*. I will return to this in the following section.

[70] Heidegger explains that *logos*, derives from the Greek verb *legein* which originally had the meaning of "to gather", "to collect" and hence logos referred to a "gathering". Taking a step further, Heidegger links gathering to revealing in order to argue that in its essence, language is a gathering that reveals; that is, speech or discourse is that which discloses Being as the unconcealment in which entities are made manifest in the world. For more on this, see chapter 5.

"metaphysics", theistic or atheistic, is born of the demand of discourse to speak about that which is unspeakable. Discourse, despite itself, springs forth as an echo of what cannot be said, transgressing itself in the moment of its constitution. Silence is not simply a matter of not speaking; rather, it is the site of an impossible articulation of that which cannot be spoken.

In many ways, we have reached the central problematic of *Atheism*. It is, therefore, worth lingering here for a moment to fully appreciate the problem Kojève brings into relief. Different from Heidegger, who traces, in *BT*, the history of metaphysics (or, rather, ontology) through a reification of Being as an entity (substance in Aristotle, subject in Descartes, spirit in Hegel, etc.), Kojève links metaphysics to a compulsion to speak what is essentially ineffable. Kojève is against any conception of atheism that thinks God's inexistence in the form of a negation. Unlike the unicorn or the square-circle, Kojève argues that "negation of the existence of God is an answer to the question about God" and thus already assumes the very thing it wishes to deny (Kojève, 2018, p. 2).[71] The problem is that, unlike the square-circle or unicorn, when it comes to the denial of the existence of a deity, what is negated does not exist like any other object: "If we give the concept of existence the meaning we give it when we say that this paper, table, room, our land—or even the entire material world as a whole— exists, then we can hardly call the negation of the existence of God in this sense atheism" (ibid.,). Understanding the difference between theism and atheism means that we must understand what is meant by God's "existence" and how such an existence can be denied. And herein lies the central problem powering Kojève's text: atheism must be differentiated from theism, but to properly enact this differentiation atheism cannot simply lapse into negative theology by way of the negation—and so, according to Kojève, the proto-*affirmation*—of God. Complicating

[71] In his book, *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*, Didier Franck argues that "negativity is revealed in the expression 'God is dead ' […] an expression not of atheism but of ontotheo-logy" (Franck, 2011, p. 27).

this problem, however, is the shared non-discursive—or, better, ineffable—character of the God of negative theology and the atheistic nothing.

By situating Heidegger's problematisation of the nothing within a religious register, Kojève says that atheism faces a particular difficulty of differentiating itself from apophatism. He elaborates on the nature of this problem arguing that the attempt to draw a line between atheistic nothingness and theistic somethingness can be traced back to Neo-Platonism and its subsequent Christian interpretations. Plotinus, the founder of Neo-Platonism, describes the figure of the "One" (τό ἑν) as a basic principle that both encompasses and transcends all entities: "The One is all things and no one of them; the source of all things is not all things; […] It is precisely because there is nothing within the One that all things are from it" (Plotinus, 1970, p. 380). The One itself operates like a shadow: enclosing all things while being comprised of nothing. It is the possibility of all objects, yet not an object itself. Just like Jaspers' Encompassing (see chapter 1), it is beyond all knowledge, thought, and discourse. Plotinus thus feels compelled to ask: "How, then, do we ourselves come to be speaking of it? No doubt we deal with it, but we do not state it; we have neither knowledge nor intellection of it. But in what sense do we even deal with it when we have no hold upon it?" (Plotinus, 1970, p. 396). If the unspeakable is what it says it is, how can it even be said to be unspeakable? How do we grasp what is ungraspable? The One is unknowable and ineffable in the sense that it cannot function as a typical object of knowledge and discourse.[72] Consequently, as Kojève himself points out, "the 'One' is interchangeable with the term for 'Nothing' (μη όν, ουκ όν)" (Kojève, 2018, p. 136).[73]

[72] As the classical scholar E.R. Dodds (whose work focused in part on the "irrational" in Greek philosophy) puts it, the One "is unknowable: its nature—or its Super-Nature, its Supra-Existence—is conveyed theoretically by the simple statement that it transcends all the knowable" (Dodds, 1970, p. xxiv).

[73] Kojève provides a more detailed interpretation of Plotinus in the third volume of the *Essai d'une histoire raisonnée de la philosophie païenne* (Kojève, 1997, pp. 246-260).

Isolating this aspect of Neo-Platonism and its influence on Christianity, Kojève analyses the various formulations of God which embrace the conflation of indeterminate somethingness and nothingness as two sides of the same inexpressible coin. In particular, Kojève focuses on the negative theology of St. Augustine, John Scotus Eriugena, and Meister Eckhart. In *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine claims that not only can we not know God, but even the attempt to speak about God is problematic:[74]

> Have I spoken something, have I uttered something, worthy of God? No, I feel that all I have done is to wish to speak; if I did say something, it is not what I wanted to say. How do I know this? Simply because God is unspeakable. But what I have spoken would not have been spoken if it were unspeakable. For this reason, God should not even be called unspeakable, because even when this word is spoken, something is spoken (Augustine, 1996, p. 17).[75]

For Augustine, it is not enough to even say that we cannot speak of God since even this apophatic denunciation discloses too much. Yet even though the object of speech is completely barred there remains a compulsion to say something—even if it is only to say one cannot say anything. The symptom of this urge to transgress the discursive boundary—the precipice that situates the fundamental problem of metaphysics—is found in the paradox of having to speak in order to pronounce something as unspeakable. Of course, we can speak the word "God", this is not a problem. Rather, the paradox arises in the application of this word which calls for a transgression, what Kojève calls a "contra-diction": a discourse that goes against the act of

[74] Deirdre Carabine argues that Augustine presents us with an interesting example of negative theology since he developed his philosophical theology before apophasis had made its entry into Christian theology via Pseudo-Dionysius (Carabine, 1992, p. 5).

[75] The "wish to speak" that is projected in a misdirected speech, saying that which it did not intend to say, also resonates in Kojève who argues that God is first addressed in a mortal cry that is converted into a prayer. The human being, facing death, yells out into the abyss of nothing and, *per impossibile*, attempts to address it—it is this fear that first makes Gods, "*primus in orbe deos fecit timor*" (Kojève, 2018, p. 102). I will return to this link between discourse and death below.

speech itself.[76] The contra-diction is palpable in Augustine. He deliberately betrays his own prohibition on speaking *by* and *through* speech; his words are thus plagued by their own paradoxicality.

With this in mind, Kojève points to an even more radical type of negative theology in the thought of Eriugena, who, as Kojève writes, "while reaching the final frontier on the way of apophatic theology, does not arrive at a positive account of God following Augustine" (Kojève, 2018, p. 135). Eriugena goes further than Augustine by attempting to sustain a Christian Neoplatonism based on the notion of an unknowable, transcendent God beyond all Being and non-Being. He argues that God proceeds from an abyssal nothingness, the *nihil*. The *nihil* is described as a completely inaccessible realm: incomprehensible and ineffable. Yet, it is out of this void that the light of Being emerges through a process of self-articulation. The spoken Word breaks through the silent nothingness, springing forth as the primary cause of creation. God as the site of both nothingness and all existence; a silence that is the condition of possibility of all discourse. Yet, here we are placed squarely within the "contra-diction". The "*nihil*" betrays its own function: it names the unnameable, gives speech to the unspeakable, attempts to grasp what eludes all capture. The *nihil* signifies only what it fails to signify. Seemingly wanting to push this contradiction even further, Meister Eckhart uses the term "Godhead" to denote a primordial origin that is even prior to the *nihil*.[77] But, as Kojève points

[76] This kind of transgression is what Kojève sometimes refers to as "mysticism". In a letter to Georges Bataille, a prominent attendee of Kojève's lectures on Hegel, Kojève wrote how it was the unique theme of mysticism (a category which he says includes Bataille) "to verbally express (!) silence, to speak (!) of the ineffable, revealed by the discourse (!) that obscures it." We notice here that, similar to Heidegger, Kojève employs punctuation to emphasize the paradox of speaking the nothing. This is because "to succeed at expressing silence verbally, is to speak without saying anything" (Kojève, 1970). I will speak about this particular exchange with Bataille again in the chapter 5.

[77] This origin that is beyond the creator God also figures in German Idealism in the philosophy of Schelling, especially in his later period. For example, in his *Weltalter* drafts he refers to the inexpressible "opposition of what-is (*ein Seyendes*) and being is thus present; but what could express it does not actually express it. The expressing is present as well, but it does not attend to the opposition; it is indifferent toward it. This indifference [*Gleichgültigkeit*] that we have also considered elsewhere under the name of absolute indifference [*absolute Indifferenz*] of subject and object, we call the absolutely First [*das schlechthin Erste*]" (Schelling, 1997, p. 131).

out, there is something disturbing behind the ideas of "Eckhart and Eriugena, i.e., undoubtedly Christians, who called God 'nothing'" (ibid., p. 26). Even though they call God nothing, they certainly do not understand themselves as atheists.[78] Instead, what they (albeit, unintentionally) seem to point towards is a paradoxical convergence between theism and atheism.

When speaking of the "One" of "God" or of the "nothing", a horizon inevitably appears that marks a suspension of the passage from discourse into silence. In negative theology there is nothing to say about its supposed object, whereas in atheism there is nothing to say about the nothing. Yet different from the apophatic recourse to a signifier that has no corresponding signification, the atheist, it would seem, wants the nothing to disappear into oblivion. However, as we have already seen in Heidegger's debate with Carnap, the nothing still finds ways to show itself even if—or, perhaps, especially—when we try to dispel it. The shadow of nothingness remains if only as the presence of what is absent. And it is the lingering shadow that preoccupies Kojève: "Eckhart and others say that God is Nothing (*Nichts*), this 'Nothing' is with a capital letter"; conversely, for the atheist, God is also nothing, "'nothing' not with a capital, but the smallest—best of all, if that were possible, with no—letter—*nichts, weniger als nichts* [nothing, less than nothing]" (ibid., pp. 180, 98).[79] For the atheist, it is not God that is

This essay in particular plays an important role in Kojève's text on *The Religious Metaphysics of Vladimir Solovyov*. Kojève argues that Solovyov's religious philosophy essentially traverses Schelling's conception of the Absolute as it is presented in Ages of the World (Kojève, 2018b).

[78] Kojève also notes that another radical form of negative theology can be found in the atheistic thought of Nāgārjuna who is known for his radical approach to the concept of nothingness or emptiness (*Śūnyatā*). In his most famous work, *The Stanzas on the Middle Path* (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*), he explains that *Śūnyatā* is neither the Absolute nor pure nothingness, rather it can only be grasped in silence, more specifically, the silence of Buddha.

[79] It is an expression that resurfaces nearly 80 years later in the work of Slavoj Žižek who uses it in the title of his magnum opus, *Less than nothing: Hegel and the shadow of dialectical materialism*. It is interesting that the "less than nothing" would be described as a kind of shadow. For Žižek, this shadow is the indivisible remainder that results from a striving to reach the void. What one finds there is not nothing but that which precedes nothing: "less than nothing, the pre-ontological multiplicity whose names range from Democritus's *den* to Lacan's *objet a*. The space of this pre-ontological multiplicity is not between Nothing and Something (more than nothing but less than something); *den* is, on the contrary, more than Something but less than Nothing" (Žižek, 2012, p. 495). For more on Žižek's connection to Kojève, see chapter 5.

placed under a discursive injunction, but rather nothingness itself. For the atheist, "it is not possible to say what this nothing is, since it is not. About such a thing one *must not* only say nothing, there is *nothing to say*" (ibid., p. 6). The less than nothing, the Nothing that stutters on its first letter, persists as a point of abeyance and marks the site of what Kojève calls a *hiatus irrationalis*, an absolutely irrational abyss.[80] This is the site of the stutter—a paradoxical discursive silence.[81]

I began this chapter by claiming that *Atheism* is an incomplete text. However, I also said that we should not understand this incompletion as the result of a lack of rigour. Rather, in the context of Kojève's philosophy, incompletion is the problem itself: the site of an unavoidable stutter. In one of the most enigmatic passages of *Atheism*, Kojève writes (offering no further explanation) that "it is only speech that distorts philosophy, which ideally is silence" (Kojève, 2018, p. 184).[82] It is interesting that one of the central figures of logical positivism

[80] The expression "hiatus irrationalis" is employed by Fichte in his 1804 *Wissenschaftslehre* in an attempt to convey the gap between the Absolute and our conceptual experience of it. The gap between eternal and historical truth is called irrational, not only owing because it cannot be traversed discursively but, moreover, because the very attempt to articulate the gap is beyond the realm of knowledge. Interestingly, Fichte also referred to this non-conceptual void as "the place of death" [*die Lage des Todes*] and the "abyss of reason" [*der Abgrund der Vernunft*]. The *hiatus irrationalis* was also employed by Heinrich Rickert, who Kojève studied under in Heidelberg, and Emile Lask. Weslati has pointed out that at the same time that Kojève was writing *Atheism*, Jacques Lacan, who would become one of the most prominent and influential attendees of the Hegel lectures, was himself writing a poem that he titled "Hiatus irrationalis" (Lacan, 1933).

[81] The paradox of a verbalised silence is one that Kojève will return to many times throughout his corpus (and that we will return to many times in this thesis). One striking example comes from his 1929 essay "*Zum Problem einer diskreten 'Welt'.*" In this remarkable text, Kojève contemplates the problem of thinking nature *qua* nature within the ambit of the limits of human discourse: "If there were no thinking, the "biological" world would be an existing reality, just like the physical one, if there were no organisms, or in a certain sense the mathematical one, if no 'matter' existed. But this sentence is admittedly only correct 'between the lines', so to speak, because strictly speaking it is senseless, something even much worse than a squared circle. Because by talking about a 'world' in which there is no speech, I talk about something which in principle cannot be talked about. As soon as I talk and just because I talk, this speechless 'world' becomes an abstraction. I can talk about it only insofar as I exist in a 'world' which allows speech, insofar as this 'world' exists, and the speechless 'world' exists only in my talking about it" (Kojève, 2023). Pre-discursive nature, just like the God of negative theology and atheistic nothingness, is a contradiction because it requires speech in order to reveal its silence.

[82] In his book, *Seeing Silence*, Mark C. Taylor writes that it is "not merely the absence of noise, silence is the stillness that sounds and resounds in all sounds and echoes in every word. There is no Word without silence, and no silence without Word. Silence is the ever-receding horizon of words. Words allow silence to speak by unsaying itself" (Taylor, 2020, p. 2).

(while not being a positivist himself), Ludwig Wittgenstein, is perhaps closest to articulating the nature of the problem at the heart of Kojève's *Atheism*. Although never mentioned by name, the influence of Wittgenstein is felt throughout this text. The *Tractatus*, a text that explores the limits of language, ends with Wittgenstein's claim that there are "things that cannot be put into words" (Wittgenstein, 1974, p. 89). Yet, it is interesting to notice that for both Wittgenstein and Kojève, the inexpressible cannot be reduced to simple silence. It is not enough to be silent, one must state, in speech, the necessity to be silent. Immediately after telling his readers that certain things cannot be put into words, the young Wittgenstein (who, incidentally, was very influenced by Russian thought)[83] is compelled to go against his own discursive injunction to say one last thing: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (ibid.). At the moment when words fail Wittgenstein, he is obliged to use them. The last sentence of the *Tractatus* is situated in the same *hiatus irrationali*s described by Kojève: a silence that persists at the limits of discourse.

2.5. Paradox of givenness (of what is not given)

In 1939, after having wrapped up the final year of his 5-year course on Hegel, Kojève wrote an unpublished review of theologian Auguste Grégoire's book *Immanence et Transcendance* (Kojève, 1985). Repeating many of the same ideas we find in *Atheism*, Kojève criticizes Father Grégoire's proof of the existence of God, not owing to any specific problem with the argument but, rather, because "the study of the more than millenary effort made in this domain allows us to ascertain the fact that all the possible proofs of the existence of God, to the extent that they

[83] The *Tractatus* was written during the First World War while Wittgenstein was stationed to an Austrian artillery division fighting on the Russian front. During this time, Wittgenstein carried around a copy of Tolstoy's *The Gospel in Brief*. This book has an enormous impact on Wittgenstein. Some commentators, notably (Malcolm, 1993) and (Shields, 1993) believe that Tolstoy's views on religion permeate Wittgenstein's entire philosophical project.

are logically correct, ultimately rest on a principle which is not at all evident" (Kojève, 1985, p. 160). Kojève does not rebuke Grégoire for failing to provide a logical statement of God's existence: "it would be detestable if I wanted to reproach the author for not having convinced me because one cannot reproach someone for having failed where it is impossible to succeed" (ibid.). This claim, in and of itself, is unsurprising. The fact that God's existence is a mystery that escapes comprehension for those who believe is far from a novel insight. What is insightful, however, is Kojève's claim that the same holds true of the atheist's denial: "to decide—*rationally* or *theoretically*—for or against God, in the *final* analysis (that is, the ontological analysis), means to *choose* one of these two opposed affirmations. Now, once again, placing itself on the ontological level, reason cannot do it. As Kant has very rightly noted, the theism/atheism problem cannot be solved by *theoretical* reason on its own" (ibid., p. 163).

Up to this point, it can be said that I have been treating the problem of theism and atheism from a "theoretical" perspective, arguing that both reside within a *hiatus irrationalis*—an ineffable void that coerces words only so that they may dissolve the instant they are uttered. Whether an atheist or theist, one is trapped within a discourse that betrays its own object. But if we have reached the point where one cannot speak are we not obliged to be silent? Have we not reached a kind of philosophical deadlock? Instead of dispensing with this problem by admitting defeat, or worse, seeking a way out of the paradox by offering cheap justifications, Kojève obliges us to tarrying within the limits that these aporias set. Since everything that seems like a solution gets covered over, it is "precisely the aporetic aspect of the position that shows us the way out" (Kojève, 2018, p. 16). It is precisely *because* one cannot know the difference between theistic somethingness and atheistic nothingness, that a non-cognitive solution presents itself. For Kojève, then, the dispute between atheism and theism must be transposed onto a different terrain. What is at issue is a non-conceptual, existential *decision*

between atheism and theism that does not rest on purely logical principles. But what does such a decision entail?

On the one hand, for most theists, a relationship with God is, indeed, not founded upon direct knowledge but is instead rooted in faith and feelings such as love, beatitude, mystical ecstasy, etc. On the other hand, if atheism is understood as ignorance of the religious problem as such, the rejection of anything departing from what is given by the senses, then the noncognitive relations that the theist supposedly experiences are rejected by the atheist as illusory. However, as I have stressed, Kojève is not interested in this "positivist" form of atheism. Instead, he asks if there is an existential encounter possible for the atheist that is analogous to theistic religious phenomena without being reducible to it. As Kojève says, "the problem of theism/atheism cannot be solved except to the extent that it is transposed to the […] phenomenological, or—if one prefers—'existential' level" (Kojève, 1985, p. 163). That is to say, if a choice between theism and atheism is possible, it cannot be between the presence or absence of an unknowable intuition that comes from without; rather, it is a choice between a theistic intuition of an unknowable God and an atheistic intuition of an unknowable nothingness.

The use of the terms "phenomenology" and "existential" are a clear reference to Heidegger.[84] The phenomenological orientation of *Atheism* emerges most clearly in connection with Kojève's use of the Russian term данность, which can be translated as "givenness".

[84] And, to some extent, also to Husserl. Jeff Love explains in the translator's introduction that "the essay's distinctly phenomenological orientation that emerges perhaps most clearly in connection with the notion of 'givennness.' The Russian 'dannost' is arguably less unusual than the English 'givenness,' and this word is at the centre of the essay's discussions of what is given to us and how it is given. The term as such is very likely a translation of the German *Gegebenheit*, associated mainly with Husserl, and for Kojève simply suggests something given in the human interaction that is the world" (Love, 2018b, p. xxxi). What Love is referring to is Husserl's notion of an original, pre-categorical *givenness*—that is, the view that the logical form of judgment has a pre-logical foundation of what is originally given. Yet, while intuition—or what he calls *Wesensschau*—plays a central role in Husserlian phenomenology as what is immediately given, Kojève is critical of this approach: "Husserl does not satisfy me here since he remains a rationalist in the classical sense" (Kojève, 2018, p. 185).

Within the frame of *Atheism*, the term suggests a fundamental intuition that binds together the "I" of the human being and the "not-I" of the world in a basic unity referred to as the "human being in the world" (человека в мире). According to Kojève, the decision between atheism and theism rests on how the "givenness" of the human being in the world is interpreted as a basic intuition. In this vein, Kojève differentiates between two kinds of givenness which he calls the "modality" and "tonality" of givenness. The modality, or "modus" of givenness refers to the way the human being is given in its interaction with the world. Similarly to Heidegger, Kojève says that the human being always already finds itself involved in the world. This involvement can take on a multiplicity of different "modes" that "corresponds to the homogeneity of the qualified content of the 'human being in the world'" (Kojève, 2018, p. 37). For example, a physicist or biologist is given the world "mathematically" or "scientifically", a particular mode of givenness that is not compatible with the poet or musician who is given the world "aesthetically." But the modality of givenness also describes more mundane activities such as interacting with the world in the mode of walking or having a chat with friends. These ways of being in the world correspond to what Heidegger would call "everydayness" (*Alltäglichkeit*), a mode of existence in which the human being exhibits itself in a determinate way in and through its interaction in an "environment" (*Umwelt*) of items (*Zeug*) and entities (*Seiende*) ready-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*) and present-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*) (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 37-38, 93-94). In Heidegger's analysis, the formal givenness of the subject as "involved" in the world of things (Heidegger, 1962, p. 404)—that is, in its particular or "ontic" (*existentiell*) determinations—do not penetrate into the question of the ontological structure of the givenness of the human being as such, i.e., the Being of the human being, its Being-there (*Dasein*). Thus, in order to clarify the givenness of the human being in the world, the mode of its givenness must be contrasted to a more originary givenness understood as the basis upon

which the given has always been given.[85] Kojève calls this originary givenness tonality.[86] The tone references an originary givenness that does not refer to any specific way the human being is involved in the world; prior to any modality, the tone of givenness refers to "the givenness of the given" itself (Kojève, 2018, p. 145). For Kojève, the tone is what gives the human being in the world a sense of its wholeness, its completeness.

In much the same way as Heideggerian "transcendence", the tone of givenness, the givenness of what is given, is what first makes possible the unity of the human being in the world.[87] However, different from Heidegger, Kojève argues that there is more than one way this tonality is given; that is, in Kojève's own words, "there is no 'basic' givenness" (Kojève, 2018, p. 151). There are, in fact, two possible tonalities that must be considered: theistic or atheistic, a variation that persists owing to a fundamental disagreement on the way in which the givenness of the world is given. Kojève argues that while the theistic tone of givenness is well-known, the atheistic tone has yet to receive proper treatment and understanding. At the same time, an understanding of the former case points the way to the latter. Therefore, before presenting the atheistic case, he begins with the theistic tone of givenness which, he argues, is well-defined in the work of German theologian Rudolf Otto.

[85] According to Heidegger, the starting point of philosophy is simply the "*es gibt*," "it gives, there is." In his later work (work that Kojève does not explicitly reference), the "*es gibt*" will take on different formulations. For instance, in *Contributions to Philosophy*, he will refer to the event of appropriation (*Ereignis*) as that which "gives Being" in the sense of a realm where Being manifests itself to itself. This formulation is also said to be synonymous with Beyng (with a "y" instead of an "I") which is the source of the Being of beings, i.e., Beyng is the givenness of the givenness of beings (Heidegger, 2012). Richard Polt, in his book *The Emergency of Being*, says that the "the givenness of the given is not to relive an old experience of something, but to become aware of a sense of the whole that must be in place before anything can be experienced" (Polt, 2006, p. 27).

[86] Kojève sometimes uses the German word, *Gegebenheitstonus*, in order to emphasize its relation to the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger, see (Love, 2018b).

[87] In *BT*, Heidegger describes an "ecstatical-horizonal" transcendence as that which discloses the wholeness of the world as temporality: "Having its ground [*gründend*] in the horizonal unity of ecstatical temporality, the world is transcendent" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 417).

According to Kojève, Otto "correctly" describes the "tone of givenness of the Divinity" in his 1924 text, *The Idea of the Holy* (Kojève, 2018, p. 166). As the subtitle of the book suggests ("An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational"), Otto is concerned with elucidating a specific type of non-conceptual, non-discursive experience opposed to the rational, describing an inexplicable "shudder" or "shiver" (*Das Schaudern*) that moves the human being deeply, a "feeling which remains where the concept fails" (Otto, 1969, p. xxi). [88] He claims that the origin or essence of religion is not found in theoretical reason but is instead based on an experience of an unknowable intuition that he calls a "creature-feeling" (*Kreaturgefühl*). It is this feeling that sets the essence of religion apart from all doctrinal or institutional elements insofar as it "remains inexpressible—an ἄρρητον or ineffable" (ibid., p. 2). In so doing, Otto rejects the dependence structure that supports an original feeling of religious consciousness, arguing that a sense of causality or authority has no place in the originary feeling of religious consciousness. That is not to say that dependence or causality does not describe our *conceptual* understanding of God; the creator god, that is the condition of all that is, pertains only to our rational or theoretical understanding of God. It is precisely the inexpressible and ineffable character of the creature-feeling that points toward a more fundamental source: "the 'creature-feeling' is itself a first subjective concomitant and effect of another feeling-element, which casts it like a shadow, but which in itself indubitably has immediate and primary reference to an object outside the self" (ibid., p. 10). Otto calls the source of this "shadow" the *numinous*. For the feeling of transcendence to

[88] The work is explicitly in conversation with Friedrich Schleiermacher, especially his text *The Christian Faith*. In this text Schleiermacher argues that it is not creed, doctrine, or tradition at the heart of religion, but a unique feeling (*Gefühl*), a feeling of absolute dependence (*schlechthinniges Abhängigkeitgefühl*). Yet, despite the similarities, Otto criticises Schleiermacher for making the distinction between a fundamental intuition and all other worldly sensations one of degree and not of kind: "according to Schleiermacher, I can only come upon the very fact of God as the result of an inference, that is, by reasoning to a cause beyond myself to account for my 'feeling of dependence'" (ibid., p. 9). Thus, in making the original intuition based on a feeling of absolute dependence, Schleiermacher confuses the theoretical with the phenomenological. Paul Tillich makes a similar observation (Tillich, 1967, p. 96).

arise, Otto surmises that the numinous must already be given as the "deepest and most fundamental element" (ibid., p. 11). Described as a "*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*", the numinous is a mysterious shadow before which one is left only to tremble—an ineffable source that ripples out and occasions the feeling of an ecstatical shudder.

From the outset, Otto warns the reader that whoever cannot direct their mind to a moment of deeply-felt religious experience, "whoever knows no such moments in his experience, is requested to read no further" (ibid., p. 8). The numinous is available only to those who remain open to it and this openness requires a specific disposition that is ready to receive this unfathomable givenness. Kojève's analysis of the atheistic tone of givenness picks up on and takes as its point of departure the assertion that "the description of the numinous (as Otto himself says at the beginning of *Das Heilige*) is completely unintelligible for the atheist" (Kojève, 2018, p. 181) in order to repudiate it. According to Kojève, what Otto calls the numinous is only a theistic genus of the more general species of primordial givenness of the given.[89] For Kojève, this "givenness is not necessarily the givenness of God since this givenness also pertains to the atheist" (ibid., p. 45). It is not that Kojève denies the theistic tone of givenness; rather, this kind of givenness needs to be complemented by its atheistic counterpart. Thus, he wishes to build on the analysis of Otto's phenomenology of religion by expanding it to include an atheistic dimension. In the context of our reading of Kojève, we could perhaps say that the feeling of the *shudder* needs to be incorporated into a more expansive encounter with the *stutter*.

Yet, unlike the theist, beyond the spatio-temporal world of entities, the atheist is given nothing and has nowhere to go. The doorway that the theist seeks—the passage that leads to

[89] In correspondence with Gaston Fessard, Kojève writes that this kind of exclusivity, determined by a specific religious truth, is something that he does not accept (Kojève, 1992, p. 187).

the beyond of life or a connection with the divine—remains closed to the atheist. The atheist expects no gate, no transition since "everything is in some sense homogeneous" (ibid., p. 26). No matter how intangible, the interaction with something completely other than the world, a kind of heterogeneous (indeed, transcendent) interaction that is available to the theist, is absent for the atheist. All the same, Kojève claims that there is something deeply troubling about nothingness that, despite itself, points towards an abyssal and elusive origin. Making a phenomenology of atheism difficult to pin down is its overt paradoxicality. That is not to say that the theistic belief in God does not imply its own set of contradictions and paradoxes. It is, of course, enough to think of the Trinity in Christian thought and all the problems and controversies this paradoxical formulation engenders. What makes atheism paradoxical is not, however, any doctrinal commitments but, rather, the very issue of givenness itself. As Kojève explains, "a paradox remains in the worldview of the atheist: the paradox of the 'givenness' of what is nongivenness [*nedannost'*], the 'givenness' of what is not, the 'givenness' of nothing" (ibid., p. 104). In pondering the possibility of an atheistic religion, Kojève guides us toward the kernel of his thinking regarding completion. It is not that the worldview of the atheist is hermetically sealed off against anything outside of the human being and the world, nor is it the case that the human being in the world remains open to that which is beyond it. Instead, the worldview of the atheist grasps the absence (of the non-relationality of the human being in the world with anything other) as itself present.

What Kojève points to here within a religious register is analogous to Heidegger's existential-ontological depiction of human Dasein as "the null ground of its own nullity [*daß es der nichtige Grund seiner Nichtigkeit ist*]" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 354). The unity of the human being and the world (i.e., Being-in-the-world) is transcended by "the null basis of its null projection" (ibid., p. 333), which is to say, a nothingness that is both the primordial site and condition of possibility of the "thereness" of existence itself. Similarly, in "What is

Metaphysics?", Heidegger claims that the Being-there (*Da-Sein*) of existence is experienced as being "held out into the nothing [*Hineingehaltenheit in das nichts*]" (Heidegger, 1998, p. 91). For Heidegger, being held out into the nothing indicates its own kind of "transcendence" related to but essentially different from the kind that we find in religious experience. The horizon pointed to here does not consist in "raptures in which one gets carried away" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 416), but instead surpasses the limits of the world by "making man the placeholder of the nothing [*macht den Menschen zum Platzhalter des Nichts*]" (ibid., p. 93). The human being holds out into the nothing and so holds the place of the nothing. Building on ideas presented in his lectures on Hegel, Kojève will give further meaning to the idea of the human as the placeholder of the nothing in his 1943 *Outline of a Phenomenology of Right* (*OPR*): "[the human] is an emptiness which maintains itself in fullness and which nihilates [*neantit*]" (Kojève, 2000, p. 209).[90] And, in a 1950s manuscript on Kant (see chapter 4), Kojève writes that "the only adequate notion of Transcendence is that of Nothingness" (Kojève, 1973, p. 103). Yet while these ideas are developed in these later works, it is important to understand their origin in *Atheism*. It is in this text that Kojève first presents the human being in the world as given in the nothingness of what is not given.

In the context of the theism/atheism dispute, what is most relevant is how Kojève describes the tone of this givenness. Just like Otto's numinous, the givenness of what is not

[90] Kojève here invents a verb, *neantir*, which is translated as "nihilate" and would seem to be the verbal form of the noun *neant*, which means "nothingness." For Heidegger, the nothing has a "nihilating" function: the "nothing itself nihilates" (Heidegger 1998: 90). Kojève uses exactly the same terminology in his later writings, specifically in his *IRH* and *OPR* where he "anthropologises" Heidegger through a Hegelian theory of desire. For instance, in the latter he writes that human desire "remains what it is in its very actualization, for it is satisfied by what it is itself, by a desire, by an absence which nihilates. The nihilation of human desire in real Being, therefore, is not an annihilation but a permanence (*Bestehen*): it is a Being which exists and not a Nothingness which disappears. But being the being [*étant l'être*] of a desire, this Being is the negation or absence of real Being: it is an unreal or ideal Being, which exists in real Being in the sense that it nihilates there without annihilating itself, because its annihilation is its very existence" (Kojève, 2000, p. 210). We will return to this anthropological reading of Heidegger in the final chapter of the thesis.

given is revealed through a primordial feeling, one that Kojève describes using the analogy of drowning in a swamp:

> The human being knows that the swamp as a whole can take him away, and if he could find something to hang onto, he would be completely safe. But he cannot. He tries to take hold of as much as possible, lays down boards, etc., but he never knows if he has taken enough. He stands on a small bit of land but does not know if he will be able to hold it for long and fears remaining on it. He looks around, seeks another small bit of land (a closer one?), avoiding the slippery spots (but, perhaps, they are firmer?), jumps onto it and is afraid again, searches again, etc., without end or, more accurately, until the end: he will run until he drowns or for as long as he has not drowned, he will run—such a person is not serene and not secure; they are in terror (Kojève, 2018, pp. 76-77).

The shudder that the atheist feels is not one of awe or beatitude—it is one of utter horror (*uzhas*) or terror (*zhut'*). The terror that one feels as the firm ground of existence breaks apart, is an explicit reference to Heidegger's description of the primordial "mood" (*Befindlichkeit*) of anxiety (*Angst*).

The givenness of the "human being in the world" as a whole in the tone of terror and horror is understood by "Heidegger as *Angst*" (ibid., p. 145). Moreover, just as Heidegger does, Kojève distinguishes the existential-ontological dimension of anxiety from the psychological state of fear. For Heidegger, fear is a kind of ontic (i.e., psychological, psychosomatic) sensation brought on by the presence of some*thing* threatening or as the expectation of some kind of troubling object ahead. Anxiety, on the other hand, is a feeling of the nothing of existence: "The nothing unveils itself in anxiety —but not as an entity. Just as little is it given as an object. Anxiety is no kind of grasping of the nothing. All the same, the nothing becomes manifest in and through anxiety" (Heidegger, 1998, p. 89). Just as the shudder is the response to what is utterly inconceivable and unknowable, terror, horror, or *Angst* is not toward an entity within-the-world but a presence of complete absence. As Kojève says, "nothing is only 'given'

in *Angst*" (Kojève, 2018, p. 151). It is the feeling that arrives along a path that leads one nowhere and brings one face to face with the nothing, with the possibility of the impossibility of existence itself—that is, in *death*.

Without making any explicit reference to Otto (or Kojève), in *The Gift of Death*, Jacques Derrida talks about the *mysterium tremendum* as representing the "limit to knowledge" which "can no longer relate to the cause or unknown event." It is precisely the chasm between the human being and "the unseen or unknown that makes us tremble" (Derrida, 1995, p. 55). Although this mystery can be interpreted as having its source in the gaze of God, for Derrida, this mystery is actually found in the figure of the gift of death: "what is given in this trembling, in the actual trembling of terror, is nothing other than death itself, a new significance for death, a new apprehension of death, a new way in which to give oneself death or to put oneself to death [*se donner la mort*]" (ibid., p. 31). Derrida says that the confrontation with the *mysterium tremendum* is the paradox of the instant (*Augenblick*), which escapes the circularity of time by appearing as that which Kierkegaard calls death's *decision*. As I will show in the final section, for Kojève, death also entails a decision. It is the way that one decides about their death that ultimately determines the difference between theistic somethingness and atheistic nothingness.

2.6. Towards the End: Death that lives a human life

In a remarkable passage from his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Kant contends that the thought of one's own death is inherently contradictory. The thought of death emerges as a demand of reason, one that cannot be avoided yet also breaches the limits of the understanding and produces an illusion which "cannot be pushed aside, for it lies in the nature of thought as a way of speaking to and of oneself. The thought *I am not* simply cannot exist; because if I am not then I cannot be conscious that I am not" (Kant, 2006, p. 60). Referencing this specific passage from the *Anthropology*, Kojève argues that the thought of one's own

inexistence arises from an "absurd combination of words, for 'I' am in the first place alive, while in the second 'I am dead', i.e., saying 'I think', I say already that I am alive" (Kojève, 2018, p. 50). For both Kant and Kojève, the human being cannot think its own death; yet this only points toward a lack of theoretical knowledge.

As I alluded to in the previous section, this conceptual lacuna opens up the possibility of an interpretation of a more primordial givenness. For the theist, death is not an impassable boundary, but a border that is capable of being traversed. Where or how this crossing takes place cannot be known; yet the theist insists that a pathway exists, and it leads (at least potentially) to God. In his 1952 text *Kant*, Kojève will argue that Kant himself is representative of this way of thinking. Citing various passages from the second *Critique*, Kojève contends that the space Kant opens between *knowing* and *believing*, more specifically, a belief in in a future world and immortal soul, does not foreclose on the possibility of a doorway that leads to God.[91] Unlike knowledge, which stems from logical certainty, Kant argues that one can have moral certainty based on subjective grounds: "I must not even say **'***It is* morally certain that there is a God,' etc., but rather **'***I am* morally certain' etc." (Kant, 1998, p. 689). The shift from the "it is" (es ist) to the "I am" (*Ich bin*) is a move from knowledge to belief, a transition from an objective to a subjective view. At the same time, as we saw in the previous section, the space between knowing and believing does not necessarily lead to God either. The atheist can be said to be "morally certain" that there is no God. And, different from this theistic interpretation of death, Kojève argues that the atheist understands death as a path that leads nowhere. The

[91] As Kant says in the first *Critique*, the goal of human action is fixed by "a single condition under which this end is consistent with all ends together and thereby has practical validity, namely, that there be a God and a future world" (Kant, 1998, p. 689). I return to Kojève's interpretation of Kant's Critical philosophy in chapter 4.

primordial feeling of terror or horror arrives in the absence of knowledge of one's own death, the fact of which beckons one to nothing and nowhere.[92]

Kojève's understanding of death, once again, hinges on an interpretation of Heidegger. In *BT*, Heidegger presents a picture of death that differs from our "everyday" conception of it. In an "everyday" sense, all living things die. There is, of course, nothing profound in this statement. However, different from physiological or biological "perishing" (*Verenden*), Heidegger claims that there is a more "authentic" (*Eigentlich*) way that we ourselves as human beings experience our own death.[93] Following convention, the German word *Eigentlich* is translated as authentic; yet this translation fails to capture the sense of "ownness" that the prefix *eigen* implies. For Heidegger, *Eigentlichkeit* is meant to signify a basic proprietary relation, a fundamental "ownness". Conversely, the human being that exists "inauthentically" is one that has not taken hold of its "own way" of existing and is stripped of its individuality in exchange for a particularised existence amongst the "they" (das Man)—a disowning that is a falling (*Verfallen*) into the world of everyday existence. In relation to death, inauthenticity points to the fact that although as human beings we are constantly aware of our *own* mortality, we recoil from this fact by "recoining 'death' as just a 'case of death' in Others—an everyday occurrence." Such an everyday understanding of death is described by Heidegger as an evasion in the face of the fact that one is "always dying already", that is, as a "Being-towards-the-end [*Sein-zum-Ende*]" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 298). Different from an inauthentic apprehension of death that understands Being-at-its-end (*Zu-Ende-sein*), authentic death—a death that is one's *own*—is not something that can be grasped and held onto like a ribbon at the end of race. Just

[92] As Heidegger says, "in the face of which one has anxiety is characterized by the fact that what threatens is *nowhere*" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 231).

[93] Heidegger reserves the word "perishing" (*Verenden*) for the way that all living things cease in their biological activity. As Heidegger explains, the human being cannot be spared from the kind of death appropriate to anything that lives. In so far as this is the case, the human being too "can end without authentically dying, though on the other hand, qua Dasein, it does not simply perish" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 291).

as in Kant, unlike the death of other people or animals, *my* death is something that can never be experienced because it is the limit of *my* experience.[94] The human being does not have an end that brings everything to a stop, or even a point of transition, but exists only as *endlich*, that which "stretches along between birth and death" (ibid., p. 425). Being *towards* the end understands death as that which is always before us in terms of its *potential* but that can, nevertheless, never be *actualised*: it is the possibility of the impossibility of existence as such. In this sense, death is that which is always held in abeyance; as Kojève says, the givenness of what is not given.

It is specifically from within this context that we can understand one of Kojève's more enigmatic passages. In his first year lecturing on Hegel (1933-4), Kojève delivered a seminar (left unpublished in the English edition) on the topic of death where he referred to the human being as a "death that lives a human life" (Kojève, 1973, p. 134). This expression, "death that lives a human life", is normally associated with the thought of Georges Bataille, more specifically as it relates to the notion of sacrifice.[95] However, the first use of this expression is found in Kojève in order to express the idea of human being as suspended in a passage from potentiality and actuality. Death is, of course, given to everyone but it is not given like any

[94] To aid in this understanding of death as being toward the end, Heidegger employs that example of a piece of unripe fruit. In its process of ripening, the fruit is in a state of its own becoming. Yet, the part that is not yet complete does not come from outside of the fruit; it is internal to the process of becoming itself. The ripening fruit "not only is not indifferent to its unripeness as something other than itself, but it is that unripeness as it ripens. The 'not-yet' has already been included in the very Being of the fruit, not as some random characteristic, but as something constitutive" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 288). The piece of fruit is constituted in and through its not being complete. This is the image Heidegger wants to present of the human being as being toward the end. At the same time, although formally analogous, in terms of their "ontological structure" there is a specific difference between ripeness and authentic death. On the one hand, the process of ripening actually leads to fulfilment: the fruit "*fulfils* itself" (*vollendet sich*) when it becomes ripe. Differently, authentic being toward the end is grounded in an essential incompletion.

[95] And has, moreover, been used subsequently by various thinkers whose work builds on the ideas of Bataille. For example, Achilles Mbembe, in his book *Necropolitics*, claims that politics is "a death that lives a human life" (Mbembe, 2003, p. 14). Although Bataille is referenced in this work, the original use of the expression by Kojève is unmentioned.

other thing. In a letter to Bataille, Kojève describes human existence as "the putting off until later. And the 'later' itself is death" (Kojève, 1970). Like Heidegger, Kojève understands death authentically as that which is radically different from a terminal state or point of completion: "Death is like that irrational point taken from a straight line that does not exist but that separates both segments and creates them as segments, a point that is impossible to reach from the segments and that is determined by these segments" (Kojève, 2018, p. 56). As Being toward the end, death is available only as an unfathomable irrational point, a *hiatus irrationalis.*

For Kojève, the "putting off until later" is viewed differently depending on whether or not one is a theist or atheist. Famously, in his 1794/95 *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte wrote that what sort of philosophy one chooses depends on the kind of person one is. Referencing this passage in *Atheism*, Kojève writes that "the human being until their *own* death does not know who or where they are; they never know *before the end* what atheism and theism are. And this knowledge, like all knowledge in general, is incomplete, for not completed and not capable of completion" (Kojève, 2018, p. 193). It is for this reason that authentic being *toward* death requires that a *decision* be made; however, it is not the kind of decision which involves weighing costs and benefits in order to make one choice amongst many (as, for instance, in something like Pascal's wager). It is a decision that conditions the way one lives as an existence that stretches along between birth and death. Moral systems that have an eye toward the afterlife are ubiquitous. What concerns Kojève is how the atheist ought to comport itself as a death that lives a human life. But what kind of decision can be made in the face of the nothingness of death?

In *BT*, Heidegger introduces the idea of resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*). Different from a habitual way of being in the world, resoluteness conveys an attunement toward the groundless of existence, upon the non-relationality of being towards the end. It is described by Heidegger as firmness or determination that allows one to hold out onto the nothing that is the horizon of

death. As such, resoluteness must anticipate death in such a way that it is always "ready for anxiety" (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 348, 434). In anticipatory resoluteness (*vorlaufende Entschlossenheit*), Heidegger locates a certain kind of action. To be "ready for anxiety" requires "taking action"; yet it is difficult to understand what he means by this since (as with many terms in Heidegger) action is defined quite loosely. Anticipatory resoluteness is not a way of escaping or even preparing for death; rather, it is a freeing for the possibility of no longer existing. In this sense, even Heidegger admits that the term 'take action' [*Handeln*]" is difficult to convey since it implies a definition of activity that also "embraces the passivity of resistance" (ibid., p. 347). He explains that anticipatory resoluteness implies the acceptance of a "fate" (*Schicksals*) in which the human being "hands itself down to itself, free for death, in a possibility which it has inherited and yet has chosen" (ibid., p. 435). It is this idea of choice that Kojève latches onto; yet, different from Heidegger, Kojève argues that this choice is not made in the face of a possibility which is constantly certain but which at any moment remains indefinite—a decision to accept one's fate—but rather as a decision to decide about this end itself. The human being is not towards death but is also "potentially, at the least, the killer"—that is, in the final analysis, the human being "is given as a potential suicide" (Kojève, 2018, p. 69).

It must be pointed out that Kojève himself enters the tricky terrain of suicide carefully by first stating unequivocally that "killing and suicide are big and complicated problems" while stressing that he only wants to talk about suicide as it relates to the theme of atheism. Kojève's analysis here echoes Dostoevsky; however, the key point of reference is not to the moral consequences of atheism as presented in *The Brothers Karamazov* where we find the infamous aphorism that if there is no God all things are permitted. Rather, it is in fact in *Demons* where we are introduced to a kind of resolute Being-toward-the-end through the character of Alexei Kirillov who argues that freedom can be found only in the paradoxical act of self-negation:

"whoever wants this freedom must *dare* to kill himself" (Dostoevsky, 2006, p. 115). But what does this *dare* really entail? Like Dostoevsky's Kirillov, Kojève argues that basic freedom is found in the act of suicide. However, this understanding of suicide must be placed in its proper phenomenological and ontological context. Understood phenomenologically, suicide, according to Kojève, marks the horizon where the human being "freely decides to be or not to be this human being" (Kojève, 2018, p. 82). Of course, suicide means different things depending on what kind of person one is. For the theist, ignoring certain prohibitions, suicide is like any other death, a pathway to another, unknown world. For the atheist, things are much different.[96] If for the atheist there is nothing outside the world, then death is a total annihilation of self and, indeed, at least from the perspective of the subject, the world itself. In this case, the decision to commit suicide is a decision to embrace the possibility of the impossibility of existence. Yet, as Kirillov intimates, there remains something empty, even deceitful, about this radical act: "He who dares to kill himself knows the secret of the deceit. There is no further freedom; here is everything; and there is nothing further" (Doestoevsky, 2006, p. 115). What links Dostoevsky to Kojève is the idea of suicide as an impossible act.[97] This might seem strange at first glance; after all, while certainly tragic, the act of suicide is common. But we

[96] In his review of Father Grégoire, Kojève contends that "the *decision* for or against God presupposes the *in*existence of God; if the *decision* is possible (insofar as it is truly free and, therefore, absolutely *conscious*), it can only be a decision *against* God." The decision for God is compatible with the existence of God only on condition of being the consequence of God (i.e., divine grace). It is a decision for something beyond worldly death. For Kojève the atheistic rejoinder to the theistic decision for God "is nothing other than *freedom* […] the affirmation of freedom is equivalent—on the phenomenological level—to the acceptance of death and—on the metaphysical level—to the denial of God" (Kojève, 1985, p. 166). Thus, following Heidegger, Kojève argues that freedom is found only in a resolution that accepts the nullity of the end.

[97] As Jeff Love points out, there is a stealthy allusion to the Russian context throughout the text, especially to "one of Dostoevsky's most intriguing characters, Alexei Nilych Kirillov from the novel *Demons*" (Love, 2018b, p. xxiv). Incidentally, Jorge Varela and Hager Weslati have pointed out that Love understands the idea of suicide in Kojève too literally. For Varela, Love "reduces every action other than suicide to a form of animal self-preservation" and, in the process, "presents Kojève as an open apologist of suicide" (Varela, 2019, p. 106). Similarly, Weslati claims that Love is too cavalier in his talk of suicide and thus misses out on the idea, the same that I have been trying to express, that Kojève posits suicide philosophically as "the ultimate expression of a paradoxical free act that puts an end to freedom" (Weslati, 2020, p. 228). However, in stressing the important role that the figure of suicide has in Kojève's thinking, Love makes an important contribution.

must keep in view the authentic notion of death as the givenness of what is not given. Seen from this perspective, the "act" of suicide can only be grasped paradoxically as an act that cannot, strictly speaking, be actualised. As Kirillov says at the end of the discussion on suicide: "Anyone can make it so that there will be no God, and there will be no anything. *But no one has done it yet, not once*" (ibid., p. 116). This is how we must understand Kojève when he says that the atheist is the "one who at any minute can kill herself but also may never do so" (Kojève, 2018, p. 83). It is because the atheist interprets their existence as something they themselves can bring to a radical end, at any time, that freedom is a *non*-act, the presence of the absence of self-annihilation.

The figure of suicide is introduced in Kojève at a critical juncture of his thinking. Philosophically speaking, suicide points to a fundamental deactivation of the Aristotelian link between potential and act. By placing itself beyond the sequence of potentiality-actuality, I argue that suicide can be seen as an example of the more general idea of what Kojève calls *désœuvrement*. Although this term, usually translated as inoperativity, is better associated with the work of Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Jean-Luc Nancy and Giorgio Agamben, as Agamben himself points out, it first appeared in a philosophical context in a series of book reviews of Raymond Queneau written by Kojève in the early 1950s (Kojève, 1952).[98] More than simple idleness, *désœuvrement* aims to present work insofar as it contains its own lack. It does not mean an absence of work or action; rather, as Agamben says, "the only coherent way to understand inoperativeness is to think of it as a generic mode of potentiality that is not exhausted in a *transitus de potentia ad actum"* (Agamben, 1995, p. 53). For his part, Kojève

[98] The article reviews three novels by Queneau (*Pierrot mon ami* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), *Loin de Rueil* (Paris: Gallimard, 1944) and *Le Dimanche de la vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952).

employs the term as a description for the "being without work" of the philosopher situated on the precipice of the end of history.

It is within this same *topos* that I argue Kojève's entire corpus should be read: a philosophy which occupies the impossible place between the completion of the system of philosophy and the articulation of this end. Far from demonstrating the end of history, politics or even philosophy, the fragmentary character of Kojève's writing invites us to consider a form of completion that arrests itself at the moment of its closure. As a completion which acknowledges its incompletion, Kojève's end of history thesis must itself be read as a form of *désœuvrement*—a deactivation of the transition from potentiality to actuality. It is this tension between potentiality and actuality, incompletion and completion, that I will now explore in the concrete case of Kojève's empire that arrives on the political scene at the end of history.

Chapter 3: A Katechontic Consideration of the End of History

3.1. Introduction: The political *brouillons*

In the first half of the 1940s, after having completed his lectures on the *PhS* and in the midst and fallout of war, Kojève turned his attention towards concrete political topics. During this time, he wrote a series of manuscripts, including an essay on *La Notion de l'autorité* (1942), a book-length *Esquisse d'une phénoménologie du droit* (1943), and a policy memorandum entitled "*L'empire latin: Esquisse d'une doctrine de la politique française*" (1945).[99] Just like the *PJ* and *Atheism*, none of these writings were published in Kojève's lifetime and, as far as one can tell, were not intended for an audience wider than a circle of close acquaintances. There is no question that like almost all of Kojève's texts, they fall into the category of *brouillons*, unfinished drafts that aim to provide only "outlines" (*esquisses*) of their respective topics. Being incomplete, certain inconsistencies pervade these political drafts. While many examples can be pointed to, I take as my point of departure an incongruity that has contemporary relevance.[100]

In 1936, while speaking on the subject of the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in his lectures on Hegel, Kojève took the opportunity to introduce one of his most well-known, yet contentious, expressions—the universal and homogeneous state: "For Hegel (1806) it is a

[99] (Kojève, 2004b), (Kojève, 1981), and (Kojève, 1990).

[100] Although the *OPR* and *The Notion of Authority* were written contemporaneously and appear, at least superficially, to confront a similar set of problems (political power, legality, legitimacy), there is a sense that the two texts orbit around problems that do not intersect. In the *OPR*, Kojève describes an evolution towards "hyper-liberal" globalism where the rule of men is replaced by the rule of law. Conversely, *The Notion of Authority* describes the essence of legality as the cadaver of authority, "a corpse that endures while being deprived of a soul or life" (Kojève, 2014, p. 11) and concludes with a descriptive analysis of fascism through the authority of Marshal Pétain (ibid., pp. 95-101). Some scholars have tried to square this circle with appeals to Kojève's esoteric approach to writing, but only with limited success, see, e.g., (Howse, 2000); (Love, 2024).

universal and homogeneous State, which brings together the whole of humanity (at least that which counts historically) and 'suppresses' (*aufhebt*) within it all the 'specific differences' (*Besonderheiten*): nations, social classes, families" (Kojève, 1968, p. 323). The Napoleonic Wars which had created a French dominion in the European Continent had, according to Kojève, paved the way towards a fundamental political restructuring based on a formal egalitarian ideal. He expands on this idea in his *OPR*, where he refers to the inevitable development of an international order "without external wars, without internal struggles, without revolutions" (Kojève, 2000, p. 91). This universal and homogeneous empire is revealed at the end of history because, having removed the conditions that are responsible for war and revolution, humanity no longer has any reason to change or evolve. It is the overcoming of the historical struggle for justice revealed in a complete and total recognition of all of humanity, a world society of equals.

At the same time, Kojève is conspicuously unclear about when and how this empire will appear concretely. In his lectures on Hegel, he implies that the end of history had already come to pass in the figure of Napoleon; elsewhere he claims that Stalin was in the process of ushering in the universal and homogeneous state; however, in the *OPR* he vacillates saying that it is not certain if such an empire will ever come to pass. Even more forcefully, only a few years later in the "Latin Empire: Outline of a doctrine of French policy" (*LE*), Kojève states unequivocally that "the era where all humanity will be a political reality still remains in the distant future" (Kojève, 2004, p. 15). Further complicating this indecisiveness, in the same text, Kojève introduces what seems to be an entirely different concept of empire. This time, instead of an empire that encompasses the whole of humanity, Kojève describes a world order that arises out of the tension between empire-states. Different from the global state that dissolves the political and brings an end to history, the "empire-state" is instead understood as a bulwark that seeks to hold back universality and homogeneity.

What is striking is not just that Kojève presents two different concepts of empire in the span of only a few years but that these accounts offer two incongruous ways of understanding Kojève's end of history thesis. On the one hand, the universal and homogeneous empire is the political manifestation of an actualised end of human historical time, the end of politics and, indeed, human action; on the other hand, the world of empire-states serves as a force that prevents, or, at least, delays this outcome. Yet, despite its relevance to our understanding of Kojève's philosophy of history, little attention has been paid to this incongruity. This is even more surprising given that discussion of this issue is precisely what motivates a lengthy correspondence Kojève had with Carl Schmitt between 1955 and 1957. The connection between Schmitt and Kojève is well documented; however, discussions surrounding this unlikely encounter have tended to focus on the affinity between Schmitt's political "friend-enemy" distinction and Kojève's master-slave dialectic.[101] What receives less attention are the differences concerning their respective philosophies of history.[102] Animating their epistolary correspondence is a tension that takes place at the horizon of the end of history: against Kojève's claim that the circle of historical time has come to an end, Schmitt maintains that something stands in the way of this closure, preventing its completion. As I will argue, this disagreement is not so clear-cut. Instead, the tension between a closed and open circle can, in fact, be located in Kojève's own problematic presentation of the end of history, seen most acutely through his dual concept of empire—one striving for and one pushing against the final global state. In this context, I attempt to show that Kojève's concept of empire can be situated within the ambit of Schmitt's politico-theological figure of the *katechon*, an ambiguous power

[101] See, e.g., (Howse, 2006), (Nichols, 2007), and (Palma, 2012, pp. 41-80).

[102] Massimo Cacciari is one of the few scholars to highlight this tension in his book *The Withholding Power* (Cacciari, 2018). I return to his particular analysis below.

that withholds or restrains the end of the historical time.[103] Moreover, linking this claim to the wider concerns of this thesis, I argue that as a concept that is situated at the precipice of the end, empire participates in a problem common to Kojève's entire philosophical project: the problem of completion as such.

3.2. Outline of a Doctrine: A post-war prognosis

On August 27, 1945, Kojève finished writing a memorandum intended for the upper echelons of de Gaulle's provisional Government of the French Republic. In the *LE*, he surveys the situation facing France in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War and provides a program outlining a possible future. His point of departure was that the outcome of the Second World War denoted a decisive turning point in history. According to Kojève, the defeat of Nazi Germany not only marked the end of the European Civil War, it also signalled the demise of the nation-state, the fundamental building block of political relations since 1648.

Kojève bases his analysis on the idea that international relations depend primarily on power and security which, in turn, are rooted in technological and economic conditions.[104] As technologies change and armaments evolve, the composition of and relations between state actors must also adapt. The quintessential example, he maintains, is found in the transition from feudal to national political bodies. The feudal prince was able to exercise authority so long as protection of vassal citizens could be guaranteed; however, as technological advances lead to

[103] While she does not deal with the problem of the *katechon*, Maria Laura Lanzillo does reconstruct the generis and development of Kojève's universal and homogeneous state from the perspective of his correspondence with Schmitt (Lanzillo, 2023).

[104] This idea is roughly in line with what we would now call political realism, that is, an understanding of international relations based on the role of the state, national interest, and power in world politics. Although, as we will see, Kojève does not completely dismiss the ideological aspects of politics, his primary focus is on the conflictual and competitive nature of these relations, especially as they concern technological and economic development.

the development of more sophisticated and expensive artillery, feudal political formations showed themselves to be militarily deficient. Consequently, larger and richer nation states would eventually absorb them. Analogously, Kojève argues that the Second World War had shown that the nation-state had succumbed to the same fate as feudal estates. The ineffectiveness of the nation to wield authority presents itself most clearly with the defeat of Nazi Germany: "This fundamental inadequacy — demographic and economic and, consequently, military and thus political — of national States is demonstrated in a particularly striking way by the example of the Third Reich" (Kojève, 2004, p. 5).

Kojève disregards analysis that assigns responsibility for this defeat in terms of population constraints, incompetence, or lack of planning. Instead, he maintains that it was "certainly the eminently and consciously national character of the German State" which was the cause of its defeat:

> Hitler's "nationalist" ideology would have been enough by itself to ruin the imperial project of the "New Europe," without which Germany could not, however, win the war. It can therefore be said that Germany lost this war because she wanted to win it as a nation-State. For even a nation of 80 million politically "perfect" citizens is unable to sustain the effort of a modern war and thus of ensuring the political existence of its State. And the German example clearly proves that nowadays, a nation, no matter which one, which persists in maintaining its national political exclusivity must sooner or later cease to exist politically: either through a peaceful process or as a result of a military defeat (ibid., p. 6).

Going forward, the only way that the state can maintain its military authority is if it grows in size, economically and geographically. Just as the modern state system developed out of the passage from feudal to national units, Kojève argues that the state emerging out of the post-WWII world demands a larger foundation than the nation can provide. Thus, although talk of the demise (or resurgence) of nationalism is still current today, Kojève argued that "to be politically viable, the state must rest on a vast 'imperial' union of allied nations"— that is,

empires (ibid., p. 4). The question, however, remains: what exactly does Kojève mean by empire? That is to say, precisely how does the state transition to this larger political form and what would the new post-war geopolitical epoch of empire look like?

It is not an insignificant detail to point out that Kojève uses inverted commas around the word "imperial" throughout the *LE*, which he does in order to contrast it with the term "empire". While he does not say so explicitly, it is clear that, at least in this specific context, he has a specific conceptualisation of empire that cannot be reduced to imperialism understood as a hegemonic political power—namely, a power characterised by unlimited territorial and economic expansion expressed through military, colonial, or even cultural domination. To grasp what is meant by empire in this case, it is necessary to understand the context in which he introduces the concept.

Only a few weeks before Kojève drafted an outline of his proposal for a post-war French policy, General Secretary Stalin, Prime Minister Churchill (later, Attlee), and President Truman had concluded their momentous meetings in Potsdam where the fate of Europe was being decided. Besides deliberating on the division and administration of de-nazified Germany, the conference delegates also initiated discussions on how to establish a post-war economic, military, and political order across a devastated continent. Although not a participant, the political and economic fate of France was linked to the outcome of these talks. Displaying a certain amount of prescience, Kojève deduced that the agreement to divide Germany was unstable and prone to collapse. The end of the war had given rise to a new conflict between empires and the first battle ground of this struggle was over the control of the heart of European industry. Though stalled, the German industrial economic engine would inevitably be reignited, the only question that remained was who would harness its power. Kojève argued that gradually Germany would likely be pulled out of its straitjacket and into the political and economic orbit of one of the two emerging empires: Soviet "*imperial*-socialism" or Anglo-Saxon "*imperial*-

capitalism". With that being said, Kojève also claimed that from the perspective of France and the rest of Western Europe, it would not matter materially which way the pendulum swung (as we will discuss, Kojève believed an alliance with the Americans to be more likely). Based on the assumption that as Germany goes, so does the rest of the continent, Kojève argued that the immediate danger facing France would be its eventual reduction to the rank of a secondary economic and political actor within an Americanised or Sovietised Europe.

Although remote, Kojève claimed that there was a second, even more urgent danger facing France. Only days before drafting his memo, on the other side of the world the first act of atomic warfare was committed—an event too acute for Kojève to mention explicitly. Nevertheless, he surmised that in the wake of unfathomable devastation across Europe and beyond, a military danger remained that threatened the existence of both France and, indeed, humanity:

> The more distant danger is, it is true, less certain. But on the other hand, it could be described as mortal, in the strict sense of the word. It is the danger that France is running of being involved in a Third World War and serving anew as an aerial or other kind of battlefield in it. But it is very clear that in this eventuality, and independently of the outcome of the conflict, France will never again be able to repair the damages which it will necessarily suffer above all on the demographic plane, but also on the economic one and that of civilisation itself (ibid., p. 4).

The destruction wrought in Japan proved that if war is indeed a continuation of politics by other means, then nuclear war threatens this continuity and hence the conditions of possibility for the political as such. To continue to have a say in its existence, France, like any other country, would have to find a way to maintain, as much as possible, a state of neutrality if and when war between the Russian and American empires would commence. This would require the transformation of France from piece to player in the post-war geopolitical chess game.

The task of Kojève's memo was to offer a course in which France (and the rest of Western Europe) would be able to navigate and mitigate the dangers facing the post-war

political reality. Taking into account the dynamics of the transition from nations to empires, his proposal involved the creation of an enlarged European state: a Mediterranean alliance between France, Italy, and Spain, which would allow these countries to enter diplomatic relations with already existing empires flanking them on either side. Kojève argued that this "Latin Empire" represented the only way France (along with Italy and Spain) would be able to maintain its economic and political position in Europe and, more importantly, with the rest of the world. In order to be successful, this alliance would have to create the conditions whereby a meaningful strategic position in global political and economic affairs would be possible. Only in this case, Kojève argued, could the Latin empire fulfil its ultimate objective of creating a military capable of neutralizing a conflict between the American West and Russian East, a kind of buffer zone capable of preventing—or, at least, delaying—a third world war and the nuclear conflict which would inevitably follow.

Now, as I have stated above, Kojève did not intend this memo for public consumption. It was addressed to Robert Marjolin, a student of Kojève's seminars on Hegel and who, under de Gaulle, would become a director in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For his part, Marjolin responded to Kojève's proposal negatively, explaining that the policy recommendations contained in his memo were archaic.[105] There is no evidence that the letter had any impact on the decision-makers of the time nor did the philosophical ideas presented in the document figure in the numerous debates concerning the fate of post-war Europe. Consequently, before its partial publication in Bernard-Henri Lévy's journal *La Règle du Jeu* in 1990, the document was virtually unknown. Only recently, long after its supposed date of expiration, has this document gathered attention. In 2013, Giorgio Agamben opined (in a piece that was controversial in its own right) that the discussion around Kojève's memo should be revived because it "is so topical that it is still of great interest today" (Agamben, 2013). Even

[105] For a detailed account of this encounter see (Filoni, 2021, pp. 230-238).

more recently, Bernard-Henri Lévy suggested that none other than President Emmanuel Macron should read and study the memo since "great texts are like historical events; they need time, and often the time of a human life, to take on their full meaning; and because the world seems to be, seventy-five years later […] in the exact state that Kojève predicted" (Lévy, 2021). Yet, what relevance could an obscure text, written nearly three-quarters of a century ago, still have for our world today? Moreover, doesn't the change in the geopolitical landscape, i.e., the collapse of the Soviet Union and, with it, the tensions present in a "multipolar world", not make the policies prescribed by Kojève lose the political relevance they may have once had?[106] Taking these questions into consideration, I will argue, following Agamben (and, at least in some respects, Lévy), that if the scope of the *LE* is expanded out of its specific political-historical context, and into a more general theoretical frame, the analysis it contains remains topical.

3.3. Empire with end

Before outlining the details of the continued contemporary relevance of the idea of a "Latin empire", I must first delineate Kojève's *other* use of the term "empire"—the way it is usually understood by his readers—for even here there are complications that have not been dealt with adequately. As mentioned, the term "empire" is used in two different ways by Kojève, an ambiguity which points to a specific problem that, although relevant for understanding some of his key political concepts, has gone largely unnoticed by his readers. When speaking of empire in the context of Kojève, we are usually directed to his 1930s lectures on Hegel or the *OPR*. In these texts, Kojève describes empire as synonymous with what we have already pointed to above, namely, the universal and homogeneous state. As mentioned, this form of

[106] Giorgio Barberis also draws a link between Kojève's notion of empire and the idea of multipolarity (Barberis, 2017).

empire represents the dissolution of political tensions into a universal and homogeneous society of equals based on a concept of recognition. As such, it removes the tension between states which leads to war by creating a union that encompasses the whole of humanity: "a national state never succeeds either in absorbing all its enemies or in completely isolating itself from them. The limit is only attained by the universal state or empire" (Kojève, 2000, p. 137). In this context, the word empire is still used in a way that is not different from the classical Roman idea of imperialism as *imperium sine fine*—an endless empire that seeks universal domination, an empire without limit, without border.[107]

It is worth mentioning that traces of this conception of empire can be found in work prior to his lectures on Hegel. In a short text first published in September 1929 for an issue of *Eurasia*, entitled "Toward an Assessment of Modernity," Kojève attempts to draw a picture of how a new global political order was in the process of unfolding. On the heels of the Great Depression, Kojève argues that to "to speak about the future, one must first recognise the contemporary moment, as it is the contemporary moment that indicates the future" (Kojève, 2021, p. 34). The contemporary moment that Kojève is referring to was the dissolution of the European political, economic, and cultural centre and its imperial aspirations. The receding European influence on world politics left a void that would be the site of a struggle between two emerging powers: "The United States of America has become the ruling possessor and embodiment of global capitalist unification, and the leadership of revolution has passed into the hands of the USSR" (ibid.). Despite ideological differences, Kojève maintained that both

[107] Although often depicted in a positive light, Kojève's universal and homogeneous empire is not too distant from the figure outlined by Hardt and Negri in their book *Empire*. In this text, empire is described as a universal market order of circuits of exchange and production that accepts no boundaries or limits: "Empire is the political subject that effectively regulates these global exchanges, the sovereign power that governs the world" (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. xi). Similarly, and despite his supposed Marxism, Kojève's notion of empire is certainly not representative of the endpoint of stateless socialism (Penzin, 2016). Instead, Kojève explains that the universal and homogeneous state can be understood as a kind of world economic society which is "nothing other than a market" (Kojève, 2000, p. 434). I will expand on the relationship between empire and neoliberalism in particular and, more generally, the relationship between utopic and dystopic understandings of empire below.

sides aspired to the same goal of forming a global "economic democracy"; yet, in both cases, what was being sold as democracy was, in fact, "one of the clearest examples of financial autocracy, the absolute power of financial organisation over fragmented 'democracy'" (ibid., p. 36). Moreover, Kojève did not seem to harbour any optimism about a reversal of this trend. He complains that the most serious attempt to overcome this political crisis (that, as we now know, was on the verge of spilling over into a catastrophic economic crisis), without leaving the framework of multinational capitalism, was Italian fascism. However, Kojève also conceded that Fascism only veiled the problem facing Europe by offering a fictive notion of national sovereignty, it merely donned "a Latin theatrical mask in order to play someone else's game" (ibid.). As far as Kojève was concerned, the competing interests of "capitalistic" and "revolutionary" forces, each pushing toward world unification, were contributing to a process of irreversible universalisation and homogenisation that would eventually consume what was remaining of the European economy, culture, and political autonomy.

The "contemporary moment" described in his 1929 essay shares a point of commonality with the situation described 15 years later in the *LE* where he identifies the same two forces working to overcome the political reality of nation-states and into whose dominion the earth was being divided and Europe squeezed. On the one hand, Kojève describes an American "bourgeois" liberalism that looks beyond the nation as a suitable political foundation by refusing to conceive of the state outside of its national setting and, therefore, seeks to dissolve the limits of state power in general. From this liberal perspective, the state must be replaced "by a simple economic and social, not to say a police administration, put at the disposal and at the service of 'society' conceived, moreover, as an aggregate of individuals which embody and reveal, in their own isolation, the supreme human value." On the other hand, internationalist "Trotskyite" socialism argued for the replacement of the nation with a concept of humanity: "Since political reality is deserting nations and is moving on to humanity itself, the only

(provisionally national) state which will emerge as politically viable in the long term will be the one which has as its highest and first goal to include all of humanity" (Kojève, 2004, p. 7). In either case, either liberal-capitalistic or socialist-internationalist, the goal remained the same: the unification of the globe under a universal form capable of dissolving political tensions between states.

However, in the *LE*, Kojève introduces an important difference from his previous analysis. The two competing powers whose struggle forms the new, post-war "contemporary" moment no longer are seen to necessarily lead to imperialist domination:

> the socialist-internationalist interpretation is just as wrong as the liberal-pacifist interpretation. Liberalism is wrong not to perceive any political entity beyond that of nations. But internationalism's sin is the fact that it sees nothing politically viable short of humanity. It likewise is unable to discover the *intermediary* political reality of empire, which is to say unions, or even international amalgamations of affiliated nations, which is exactly the political reality today (Kojève, 2004, p. 7).

There is no doubt that Kojève thinks that the outcome of the Second World War marked the end of the nation state as the fundamental building block of political relations. At the same time, he says that we cannot discount the specific political dimension which is constituted out of the emergence of a liberal-capitalistic West and the socialist-internationalist East. In other words, even "if the nation really ceases to be a political reality, humanity is still—politically—an *abstraction*. And this is why Internationalism is, at present, a 'utopia'" (ibid.). Moreover, this "utopia" can just as easily transform into a dystopia. The risk of nuclear war changes the political dynamic from wars of conquest to wars of total annihilation. In the run up to the concretisation of a universal and homogeneous state, a very real threat looms. The standoff between two ideologically opposed visions of a future humanity can only be resolved with the defeat of one side. In the age of nuclear war, this defeat means obliteration.

That is not to say that Kojève precludes the possibility of a universal and homogeneous state; he only wants to insist that so long as the political distinction between friend and enemy can be drawn, these boundaries must be respected. The possibility of a global world order based on a concept of humanity depends on material conditions that, in the immediate aftermath of the war, were not yet present. In his lectures on Hegel, Kojève provides a relevant example of a poet in the Middle Ages who writes that "*at this moment* a man is flying over the ocean". Kojève argues that while "this was without a doubt an error, and remained as such for many centuries, but if we now reread that sentence, we are most likely reading a truth, for it is almost certain that *at this moment* some aviator is over the Atlantic" (Kojève, 1980, p. 188). The contemporary moment of the poet dictated that flying remained only an idea without any reality; it is only in the 20th century that technology caught up to this idea making it actual with the invention of the airplane. Analogously, Kojève argues that in 1945, the actualisation of a world society remains in the distant future and it is, therefore, "impossible to jump from the nation to humanity without first going through the stage of empires" (Kojève, 2004, p. 7). This "stage" is decidedly different from the universal and homogeneous empire described in the *IRH* and *OPR*; for what Kojève introduces here is a concept of empire founded upon limitation and multiplicity.

It is this aspect of Kojève's thought that we must keep in mind when reading his controversial praise of Stalin.[108] For Kojève, Stalin was able to recognise, contra Trotsky, that to be politically viable socialism cannot skip ahead to try and encompass the whole of humanity without first passing through an intermediary stage:

> Stalin's political genius consists precisely in having understood this. The political focus on humanity characterises the "Trotskyist" utopia, of which Trotsky himself was the most

[108] There are many instances where Kojève has been linked to Stalin, Stalinism and the Soviet Union more generally, many of these of the more "conspiratorial" flavour. For more a philosophical take on this connection, see, e.g., (Barberis, 2010), (Weslati, 2014), (Penzin, 2016), (Love, 2018c), and (Filoni, 2021, pp. 195-200).

> notable—but certainly not sole—representative. By taking on Trotsky, and by demolishing "Trotskyism" in Russia, Stalin re-joined the political reality of the day by creating the USSR as a Slavo-Soviet *empire* (Kojève, 2004, p. 8).

Stalin's "socialism in one country" put the brakes on global expansion, at least for the time being. For Kojève, the humanitarian aspect of Trotsky's "internationalist" socialism is just as problematic as Hitlerian "national" socialism. Both engender a vision of a universal political entity that places it on a collision course with an equally universal idea of liberalism that opposes it.[109]

With that said, limiting expansion is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of empire. For either the Slavo-Soviet or Anglo-American empire to be viable, they must find a way to achieve political unity. A political idea that lacks concrete support, according to Kojève, "sterilises itself and disintegrates little by little, and also soon loses its specific gravity" (ibid., p. 10). Thus, contrary to the abstract universalism expressed in capitalistic liberal "society" and socialist "humanity," Kojève argues that in order to meet the demands of a post-war order, empires must be grounded in a "kinship of language, and civilisation" which are ultimately based in and manifested through an "identity of religion" (ibid., p. 15). To a certain extent, Kojève says that this commonality was what already granted the Anglo-American and Slavo-Soviet empires their own specific gravity. For example, what unites the Anglo-American sphere politically as "friends" is a shared "Protestant" identity. Referring to Max Weber's seminal work, Kojève argues that the Americans and British find common cause in and through a Puritan work ethic, combined with a degree of avarice, and a shared English language. On the other side, the political existence of the Slavo-Soviet empire has a natural support in the

[109] It was not just Stalin who received Kojève's praises. Having similarly grasped the historical reality, Kojève says that Churchill understood that the "quasi-national" Commonwealth, consisting of a union of subordinate territories, was "inadequate to affirm itself politically under the conditions." Like Stalin, Churchill understood that to survive, the Commonwealth must allow itself to be swallowed up by "an Anglo-American politico-economic bloc, which is today the effective and actual political reality" (Kojève, 2004, p. 8).

Orthodox Church (which may be a slightly unusual thing to say about a Communist state, but Kojève believes that despite its explicitly atheistic beginnings, the USSR still maintained ties to Orthodox Christianity) along with the Slavic language and tradition that accompanies it.

All of this is important for Kojève as it relates to the future of France and Western Europe. As mentioned, following the Potsdam peace talks, Kojève argued that the fate of Germany had already been sealed: "it is hardly risking committing an error to suppose that the Anglo-American bloc will transform itself before long into a German-Anglo-American empire" (ibid., p. 9). While he admits that Germany could slide eastward toward the Slavo-Soviet empire, this would be a highly unlikely outcome given historic hostilities between Germany and Russia alongside the fact that the Protestant character of the Anglo-American empire has its roots in the Germanic Holy Roman Empire. With that said, the alternative available to Germany could only really be of theoretical interest since, in either scenario, France (and the rest of Western Europe) would almost certainly follow Germany into the hands of an empire with an epicentre far from Paris. Under this eventuality, Kojève forecasted that France would quickly become a military outpost and any future political autonomy would be rendered illusory—in other words, any semblance of "independence" will only mask the reality of having been reduced to the status of a protectorate. However, different from 1929 where he argued that Europe had to be content with donning a mask to play someone else's game, Kojève was now more hopeful that Western Europe could be saved from crisis and decay by providing itself with a political base sufficient to meet the demands of empire.[110]

Building on ideas first set out by himself and Jean Cassou in an unpublished (and undated) essay "*Notes sur les défaillances de la politique française,*" Kojève suggested that the only way forward was for France, Italy, and Spain—based on their shared religious, linguistic

[110] The demand to "save" Europe is another question entirely. Although many have theorised on some of Kojève's psychological motivations, e.g., (Weslati, 2014), (Groys, 2016) and (Filoni, 2024), I leave these kinds of speculations to the side.

and historical ties—to form their own political union.[111] Contrary to (but complementing) Orthodox and Protestant "spirits," Kojève suggested that this "Latin empire" should base itself on a "Mediterranean spirit" of *dolce far niente*—that is, an aesthetic mode of life based on a form of leisure (not equivalent to the stereotypical laziness often associated with this region)—supported by an anticlerical Catholicism. Yet beyond questions of "kinship," the more difficult problem remained as to how a European empire could sustain itself militarily and economically. As Kojève puts it, "if the undeniable spiritual *friendship* of the Latin peoples makes the creation of an empire *possible*, it alone is certainly not enough to ensure it becomes a *reality.*" The post-war reality of two already existing empires meant that "a real and effective *political* union" would have to be formed capable of opposing both the Anglo-American and Sino-Soviet blocs (Kojève, 2004, p. 18). This would obviously require more than "pacts" or "ententes"; more than this, a specifically "Latin" empire would require its own military and economic machine capable of defending itself and competing with the other two empires.

With that said, Kojève was not under any illusions that a transnational alliance between France, Italy, and Spain would be able to confront the Russian or American empires on the battlefield or in the market on even terms. Quite the contrary. Lacking both an economic and technological advantage, the Latin empire could, at most, aspire to become a neutral—or, better—a *neutralising* power that could act as a mediator:

> it is only by enveloping itself in the Latin empire to which it will give rise that France will ensure peace for herself and all of Europe. This empire will never be strong enough to be able to attack the empires which will surround it so that its leaders will not be tempted too often to transform their imperial policy into "imperialism." But it will be powerful enough to remove anybody's temptation to attack it, on the condition, of course, that it does not fall out

[111] Marco Filoni notes that even though this article was found amongst Kojève's papers, there is reason to believe that the author was Jean Cassou. In any event, the *LE* was certainly indebted to ideas present in this document (Filoni, 2021, p. 231).

> simultaneously with both of its possible imperial adversaries. If these two empires were to confront one another in a martial struggle, the sole fact of a Latin empire's existence would force them to limit their battlefields (ibid., p. 11).

The goal of a specifically Latin version of empire would be to withhold hostilities in its region and beyond making sure that war remains only a possibility: "Its ultimate goal is to assure peace to its participants, and thus to all of Western Europe. Too weak to attack, it could be strong enough to establish its neutrality and thus to save the circumference of the Mediterranean and the entire West—the Latin West and the rest of it—from ruin" (ibid., p. 23). Situated both geographically and ideologically between the Anglo-American and Sino-Soviet empires, Kojève argues that the role of the Latin empire is to function as a mediating buffer enabling political interactions that would not spill over into apocalyptic nuclear destruction. This image of empire stands in stark contrast to the idea of global sovereignty in the form of a universal and homogeneous state. Rather, here it is thought within the ambit of limit and therefore diverges from and, indeed, challenges the classical model of *imperium sine fine*. That is, instead of an empire without end, Kojève thinks it in terms of boundedness: empire *with* end, an *imperium cum fine*. And although Kojève does not use this word, I argue that this concept of empire, understood as a kind of middle power, a mediating third, that maintains the political tensions between states, corresponds with the logic of Schmitt's notion of the *katechon*.

3.4. A katechontic conception of the end

As a biblical concept, the Greek word *katechon* derives its meaning from a passage found in St. Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, Chapter 2, verses 6-7. In this passage, Paul addresses a concern of the congregation who have become impatient in their expectation of Christ's return:

> Let no one deceive you in any way. For unless the apostasy comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one doomed to perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god and object of worship, so as to seat himself in the temple of God, claiming that he is a god—do you not recall that while I was still with you, I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining (τὸ κατέχον), that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. But the one who restrains (ὁ κατέχων) is to do so only for the present until he is removed from the middle (2 Thess 2, 3-8).

This enigmatic word, *katechon*, appears twice (and, as far as I know, this is the only place in the New Testament where it is found): first, in verse 6, as τὸ κατέχον, "that, which withholds," and second, in verse 7, as ὁ κατέχων, "he, who withholds." It appears in the form of a prophecy to the Christians who are gathered in Thessalonica: the *katechon* is that which delays, holds back, or restrains the ultimate confrontation between Christ and the "lawless one", the Antichrist. This final manifestation of evil will be vanquished by Christ in a catastrophic conflict which will bring an end to the temporal world. The *katechon* is therefore some kind of power or entity that holds back the lawlessness which must be overcome and destroyed at the end of historical time. In this sense, it can be understood as serving a mediating function that bridges an eschatological gap. The *katechon* is the middle (μέσου) which provides the horizon by which human history persists on the precipice of the end without making the final leap.

Although somewhat stifled, it is possible to detect in Paul's words a hidden desire for that which is holding back the lawlessness, the *katechon*, to be removed so as the end can be realised; however, this same desire reveals a hesitation, an uncertainty. On the one hand, the *katechon* can be seen to perform a positive function by restraining the end of the world by delaying the final apocalyptic encounter between Christ and the Antichrist; on the other hand, by postponing this confrontation, the *katechon* also simultaneously withholds the fulfilment of the eschaton in the form of the second coming of Christ and thus prevents the salvation of the faithful. Consequently, in occupying the "middle", the *katechon* has an equivocal relation with

the eschaton, and thus serves an ambiguous mandate. This ambiguity is only heightened by the fact that Paul is silent as to what exactly is doing the holding back. Not unsurprisingly, this opacity has resulted in various, often times conflicting, interpretations. For example, Tertullian takes a more "conservative" view by arguing that the Roman empire and its system of legality is what holds back the coming of lawlessness: "the tremendous force which is hanging over the whole world, and the very end of the world with its threat of dreadful afflictions, is arrested for a time by the continued existence of the Roman Empire" (Tertullian, 2008, p. 88). Differently, in Augustine, the *katechon* is viewed as a spiritual power that seeks to delay the final apocalyptic conflict, not principally in order to restrain lawlessness, but in order to give time for the conversion of the faithful and, hence, to increase the number of who will be saved from the wrath of God's judgment. The tension between these duelling interpretations of the *katechon* can be traced through the history of Christian thought. What is important for my investigation, however, is how this ambiguous theological concept has been inherited in more contemporary political debates, more specifically those that have been instigated in and through the work of Schmitt.[112]

In a letter to Hans Blumenberg in 1974, Schmitt writes that "for more than 40 years I have been collecting material on the problem of *katechon* (2 Thess. 2,6); I am searching for a human ear which will listen to and understand this question—for me the key question of political theology" (Schmitt, 2007). Considering the impact of Schmitt's political theology in 20th century political thought, this quote alone demands that the problem of the *katechon* be treated seriously.[113] The backdrop against which the concept of the *katechon* appears is his

[112] For more on the history of the *katechon*, both in its theological and politico-philosophical dimension, see the recently published book by Francesca Monateri (Monateri, 2023).

[113] Precisely in the context of an investigation into the *katechon*, Cacciari writes, "while the relation between theology and politics must always present itself in historically determinate terms, it also poses questions of a more general theoretical order" (Cacciari, 2018, p. 1).

analysis of the decline of the nation-state, a crisis that he understands as emanating from the collapse of Europe as the geopolitical epicentre and the disintegration of the *Jus Publicum Europaeum*. In this context, Schmitt advances what can be understood as a conservative view of the *katechon.* In his 1950 text, *Nomos of the Earth*, Schmitt makes no attempt to hide his concern with European tradition, contending that European jurisprudence, founded upon the legacy of Roman law, was a *katechon* that restrained a lawless civil disorder. The decline of the European order concomitant with the dissolution of the nation-state risked spilling over into a civil conflict. As Jacob Taubes explains, what Schmitt called the *katechon* "is the restrainer [*der Aufhalter*] that holds down the chaos that pushes up from below" (Taubes, 2003, p. 103). Thus, in order to prevent this chaos from breaching the surface and fracturing political relations, a new force capable of withholding disorder would have to be found.

Schmitt's interpretation of the *katechon* cannot be understood outside of his conceptualisation of the fundamental political distinction between friend and enemy. In the *Concept of the Political,* Schmitt describes this difference as founded upon "the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation" (Schmitt 2007: 26). In contrast with differences enacted on a moral, aesthetic, or economic level, the political distinction between friend and enemy is based on a kind of Hegelian "negated otherness" (Schmitt 2007: 63). For Hegel, the concept of identity arises only in terms of opposition, i.e., through non-identity. Schmitt generalises this idea into a concept of political enmity: the enemy is that which one is not and, therefore, political unity (i.e., "friendship") is founded upon a shared identification in contrast to the other. For Schmitt, the fault line created out of the political distinction ultimately rests upon the possibility of violent expression. However, what makes the threat of political enmity different from individual hatred is that the former can be harnessed and held at bay. In other words, despite the emphasis on killing and war, Schmitt's concept of the political is not belligerent in the sense of warmongering. Instead, emphasis is placed on political life which

sustains itself on the avoidance of war in the face of its possibility (Schmitt 2007: 32-5). Moreover, Schmitt believes that it is precisely the failure to establish political relationships which ultimately paves the way towards the uncontrolled violence of civil war. Consequently, far from ameliorating apocalyptic violence, Schmitt thinks that the overturning of old orders with more progressive political models—particularly Marxist or liberal—organised around a non-statist principle of "humanity" only manage to replace the possibility of wars between state actors with different, more insidious, forms of violence.

In Vladimir Solovyov's "Short Story of the Antichrist" (an important reference for Kojève), the Antichrist is seen as a figure that emerges not in the form of destruction and violence, but as a pacifying figure that promises world unification and an age of security and peace (Solovyov, 1962).[114] Similarly, Schmitt argues that the "peace" that is sought in liberal society or socialist humanity is one that only camouflages an even more destructive brutality expressed through the pacifist vocabulary of "executions, sanctions, punitive expeditions, pacifications, protection of treaties, international police" (Schmitt, 2007, p. 79).[115] The dissolution of political enmity in favour of a collective humanity does not lead to a peaceful utopia but, rather, to a chaotic dystopia. The enemy is no longer seen as that which one is not, i.e., as a "negated otherness", but as that which stands in the way of global justice and peace:

[114] Kojève's relationship with Solovyov is important and complicated. In 1926, under the supervision of Karl Jaspers, he drafted a dissertation on *Die religiöse Philosophie Wladimir Solowjews*, which he would later publish as two truncated essays in 1934 and 1935, respectively, in French as *La métaphysique religieuse de Vladimir Soloviev*. Although he connects his reading of Solovyov to Schelling, commentators have also pointed out how Solovyov's theory of divine humanity (*bogochelovechestvo*) or Godmanhood, a synthesis of the human and spiritual achieved through love that justifies humanity's historical development, was instrumental for Kojève's later reading of Hegel, see, e.g., (Love, 2018a); (Wilson, 2019).

[115] Schmitt expresses this same concern in his essay, "A Pan-European interpretation of Donoso Cortes" (1950), where he argues that the idea of an absolute humanity closes the door on the possibility of political relations by creating an absolute enmity: "The concept of human only superficially neutralizes differences between people. In reality, it carries with it a murderous counter-concept with the most terrible potential for destruction: the inhuman" (Schmitt, 2002, pp. 113-114).

an inhuman adversary that must be completely eradicated.[116] The *katechon* enters Schmitt's political thinking at this juncture between the *political* and *police*. That is to say, the *katechon* acts as a bulwark that seeks to preserve the political tension between friend and enemy in order to prevent an apolitical, which is to say, moral conflict between human good and non-human evil—a global civil war that, as Schmitt stresses, has as its logic only the complete annihilation of the opposing side.

In a diary written between 1947 and 1957, published posthumously in a volume entitled *Glossarium*, Schmitt makes explicit reference to the *katechon* describing it as a placeholder that extends throughout history, always occupied by something or someone: "It must be possible to point to a κατέχων for each era of the last 1,948 years. The post has never been empty, or we would not still exist" He includes extensive lists of various institutions and persons who have held back the end of human history: in all cases, Schmitt claims, "the *katechon* can be identified by the fact that it does not strive for world unity."[117] That is to say, the katechon can be understood as providing the conditions of possibility for the political as such. In this context, Schmitt's concept of the *Großraum* is relevant. Literally a "great-space," Schmitt uses the term to index a political entity that wields influence over a territory larger than that of the nation. Practically, the term describes an internally heterogeneous transnational political entity that is controlled by a hegemonic power centre. The prototypical example that Schmitt likes to use is the United States' "sphere of influence" over Latin America as dictated by the Monroe Doctrine. In *Nomos of the Earth*, Schmitt sketches out the theory of these

[116] In *The Nomos of the Earth*, Schmitt explains that this outcome derives from the logic of the "higher humanity", the classic formulation of which is found in the writings of the English philosopher Francis Bacon: "Bacon said the Indians were proscribed by nature itself as cannibals. They stood outside humanity (*hors I 'humanite*) and had no rights. By no means is it paradoxical that none other than humanists and humanitarians put forward such inhuman arguments, because the idea of humanity is two-sided and often lends itself to a surprising dialectic" (Schmitt, 2003, p. 103).

[117] Translation from the German in Michele Nicoletti, "Religion and Empire: Carl Schmitt's katechon between international relations and the philosophy of history" (Nicoletti, 2017, pp. 371-372).

political territories and the geopolitical relations that coordinates between them. Very similar to how Kojève describes the function of his Latin empire, the post-war decline of the nation-state means that *Großraum* provides an alternative to global hegemony. As Schmitt says, it must be decided if "the planet is mature enough for a global monopoly of a single power or whether a pluralism of coexisting *Großräume*, spheres of interest, and cultural spheres will determine the new international law of the earth" (Schmitt, 2003, pp. 243-244).[118] Although larger than any one nation, *Großräume* necessarily demand an orientation towards a plurality that allows for a limited co-existence on a politically divided earth. As a defender of the multipolar world order, Schmitt's *Großraum* can thus be viewed as fulfilling a *katechontic* function, that is, a force that withholds world unity and thus provides the conditions of possibility for the political relation between friend and enemy.[119]

It is in this specific context that I argue there is a similarity between Schmitt's *Großraum* and Kojève's concept of empire as it is presented in his *LE*—that is, as a mediating term positioned between the nation and humanity. As mentioned, Kojève does not use the term "katechon" in any of his writings; however, in the *LE* there are instances that implicitly echo the concept of the *katechon*. For instance, he writes that the idea of a Latin empire is to sustain a political space between the American and Russian empires as "a buffering, peaceful, global third one" (Kojève, 2004, p. 11). The presence of the Latin empire is meant to limit the possibility of global destruction by maintaining a balance of political power across the world.

[118] Riccardo Paparusso paints a slightly different picture of Kojève, arguing that in his formulation of "the concept of a Latin Empire, Kojève inherits Schmitt's concept of great space but tries to reshape it in a non-nationalist way, removing the tendency to seek out and stand against an enemy" (Paparusso, 2021, p. 108).

[119] Arguing for a specifically Latin American version of *Großraum*, Argentinian philosopher Alberto Buela writes: "Taking into account the Apostle Paul's enigma regarding the personal and the impersonal *katechon*, and Schmitt's concept of *Großraum* (a large spatial political entity), the political change to be sought today is the construction of *Großräume* in general, and of a South American *Großraum* in particular, to function as a *katechon* against a fundamentalist vision of globalisation according to which this is the only possible world" (Buela, 2003, p. 166). It should also be noted that, although he does not cite Kojève explicitly, Buela's Latin American *Großraum* shares many features of Kojève's Latin empire, including the need for a shared language, a history, and religion (Buela, 2003, p. 175).

Of course, the idea of a specifically *Latin* empire dissolved with the collapse of the USSR in the early 1990s, and in its place arose the unipolar dominance of global capitalism lead by the US. We are therefore left to ask if the concept of empire, a collection of co-existing political powers larger than the nation but smaller than a world state, still has contemporary relevance.

I prefaced this chapter with a curious comment by French intellectual Bernard-Henri Lévy which recommended that President Macron revisit Kojève's *LE*. However, the question remains as to if and how an obscure document, written roughly three quarters of a century ago, still has the contemporary relevance Lévy suggests. For his part, Lévy refers to the "Quirinal Treaty," the bilateral agreement between France and Italy signed by Draghi and Macron in November 2021. The agreement, amongst other things, is said to "promote the convergence of French and Italian positions, as well as the coordination of the two countries in matters of European and foreign policy, security and defence, migration policy, economy, education, research, culture and cross-border cooperation" (Lévy, 2021). Yet, reading both the terms of the agreement and Lévy's interpretation, one gets the sense that it does not live up to the demands set by Kojève's analysis. What exactly is "European policy" these days? Whatever it may be, any agreement between the French and the Italians seems to have arrived far too late for it to carry the geopolitical significance that Kojève imagined was still possible nearly three-quarters of a century ago. But that is not to say that Kojève's deliberations on empire are no longer relevant. Quite the contrary. His examination of the post-war geopolitical constellation of powers, his proposal for a mediating third between the US and Russia, and, finally, his retreat from this position remain instructive for our present circumstances.

In March 2013, on the heels of the European Union's new "Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union"—otherwise known as the Fiscal Compact—Giorgio Agamben published a polemic in the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* re-raising concerns involving German economic imposition in the EU. Explicitly

citing Kojève, Agamben suggests that as an alternative to the EU, Europe as a whole should reconfigure herself in the model of the Latin empire: "If we do not want Europe to inevitably disintegrate as many signs seem to indicate it is, it would be appropriate to ask ourselves, without delay, how the European Constitution […] could attempt to turn political reality into something similar to what Kojève called a 'Latin Empire'" (Agamben, 2013). In making his suggestion for a European empire, Agamben could not have been unaware of a series of articles written in the 1990s and early 2000s by fellow Italian philosopher, Massimo Cacciari. In these articles, collected under the title *Europe and Empire*, Cacciari echoes Kojève's claim made back in 1945, that the era where all of humanity together will be a political reality still remains in the distant future: "between the crisis of [national] states to a global order, there is a hiatus, a leap, which is not answered by dreaming up imaginary bridges" (Cacciari, 2016, p. 136). At the same time, Cacciari, like Agamben, thinks that the specific idea of a *Latin* empire needs to be revised: "Here is where we differ from Kojève. A Latin empire is impossible. Impossible and, indeed, portending of new conflicts with Germany and Eastern Europe" (ibid., p. 142). Like Agamben, instead of a Mediterranean bloc of France, Italy, and Spain, Cacciari argues for a European empire, one that is devised out of its diverse cultural energies opposed to the unipolar *logos* that speaks only in the language of the market: "The 'European empire' will be, if it comes to pass, the ambiguous power formed from the agreement between its always contrasting voices. Common voices, precisely, because of their centuries of tension and conjoined finally, through these very tensions, in reciprocal recognition" (ibid.). Kojève's concept of empire has also influenced, if only obliquely, a thinker who, in many ways, operates at the opposite end of the political spectrum from Cacciari and Agamben. Aleksandr Dugin has mobilised the concept of the *katechon* to support a traditional Orthodox reading that the Eastern Roman Empire (i.e., the Third Rome), in its Byzantine incarnation, acts to restrain the path of the coming Antichrist. In a recent article, Dugin writes that, serving as a bulwark against

American hegemony and market-driven globalisation, Russia remains "the last restrainer, the *katechon*" (Dugin, 2022).

What all of these thinker have in common is a claim to an expanded application of Kojève's concept of empire understood in relation to the *katechon*, a power which serves as a bulwark against the neoliberal consolidation of the world. Yet despite these efforts (or, perhaps, in light of them), there still seems to be something antiquated about claims of a European empire that restrains globalisation. As things stand (and I think both Agamben and Cacciari would agree), Europe seems quite far from a *katechontic* force withholding the push toward a neoliberal universal and, indeed, homogeneous state. No matter how one may feel about the specifically European situation, there are several questions that remain on the tip of our tongues as we collectively enter into what many are calling a new era in world politics: Have we entered a universal and homogeneous world order, free of proper political strife, where wars are ultimately fought only to achieve economic outcomes? Or, are we reverting to a multipolar world which would once again rekindle politics through the clash of empires? If it is the former, can we say that it was the failure of European politics to maintain a blockade against the rising tide of globalism, or has the very concept of *katechon* become untenable having finally emptied its post after nearly 2000 years? Conversely, if indeed we are moving back toward a multipolar world order in which empire-states will challenge what has become a uniquely American hegemony, the question still remains as to how these "great-spaces" will develop an autonomous existence within a world that is controlled by global finance.

Variations of these same questions lingered in Kojève's mind for over a decade after he penned the "Lain empire" memo. By 1955, he appears to have given up on the idea of a mediating form of empire, reverting to a position he already held in the late 1920s and into the early 1940s where the concept was understood synonymously with the universal and homogeneous state. This change in position is revealed most clearly in a lengthy epistolary

correspondence with Schmitt. In his 2014 book, *The Withholding Power*, Massimo Cacciari argues that the correspondence between Kojève and Schmitt reveals not only a shared preoccupation with the problem of depoliticisation but also a fundamental difference between their philosophies of history: "To the Hegelian prognosis, according to which history has come to an end, Schmitt opposes his own 'circle which has not yet been traversed' ('*le circle n'est pas encore parcouru*')" (Cacciari, 2018, p. 18).[120] Interestingly, Cacciari claims that their discussion should be framed in the context of the *katechon*. Unfortunately, Cacciari makes this remark in a short footnote and does not offer any further elaboration. As I will attempt to show, identifying the importance of the *katechon* in Kojève's philosophy of history highlights a problem that we have been probing, the central aim of the thesis, namely, the problem of completion itself.

3.5. On the Precipice of the Political: The Schmitt-Kojève correspondence

When the two thinkers began their correspondence, it was about ten years since Schmitt had entered forced retirement from his post at the University of Berlin and was *persona non grata* in the academic world owing to his past affiliation with the Nazi Party. Kojève was also on the other side of the cloistered walls of the university but under an entirely different set of circumstances. Having always found himself situated at the peripheries of the French intellectual scene, following the war Kojève left the university altogether to take on a role at the French Ministry of economic affairs. But beyond biographical considerations, these two academically marginalised figures found common ground in their respective political philosophies. This congruence was not entirely coincidental. Schmitt's early writings on the

[120] Citing Kojève, Pierre Macherey writes that "in the history of both the world and thought, Hegel represents the terminal moment in which the circle of human reality closes" (Macherey, 1995, p. 61). The theme of circularity as it relates to Hegel and system will return as one of the points of focus in chapters 4 and 5.

political (especially *The Concept of the Political*) guided Kojève's political thought in the 1940s, an influence that he acknowledges explicitly in the *OPR*. Conversely, while Schmitt does not mention Kojève by name in any of his published works, in his personal diary and letters he acknowledges that his thinking on Hegel and the philosophy of history were aided by Kojève's *IRH*. Yet the text that sets the tone for their lengthy correspondence is neither Schmitt's *Concept of the Political* nor Kojève's *IRH*, but Schmitt's 1953 essay "Appropriation/ Distribution/ Production: Toward a Proper Formulation of Basic Questions of any Social and Economic Order"—a text that Kojève describes as "one of the wittiest and most brilliant essays that I have ever read" (Kojève & Schmitt, 2001, p. 123).

The primary contribution of this essay is an attempt to apprehend the original meaning of the word *nomos*. Schmitt contends that the Greek noun derives from the verb *nemein* which has three distinct meanings: to appropriate, to distribute, or to produce. Distribution is here understood abstractly as those orders that are based on "law and property, i.e., the part or share of goods," while production is related "to pasture, to run a household, to use" (Schmitt, 1993, p. 55). However, Schmitt argues that prior to both of these orders (*nomos*)—what takes precedence in the hierarchy of order, so to speak—is the act of appropriation: "Prior to every legal, economic, and social order, prior to every legal, economic, or social theory, there is this simple question: *Where and how was it appropriated?*" (ibid., p. 56). While all three processes equally belong to the history of political order, that is, to the *nomos* of the earth, Schmitt argues that the act of appropriation, is predominant. Practically speaking, he claims that at the origin of every *nomos* is a land appropriation: "wars, occupations, colonisation, migrations and discoveries—indicate the fundamental precedence of appropriation over distribution and production" (ibid., p. 55). Kojève, for his part, says that on the whole, he is in full agreement both with Schmitt's entomological and politico-historical dissection of *nomos* into the categories of, as he calls them, "taking, division, and grazing" (Kojève & Schmitt, 2001, p.

123). However, he adds one, albeit significant, caveat. Whereas Schmitt claims that the *nomos* of the earth is *still* guided by meaningful appropriation, i.e., wars between political states, Kojève claims that this kind of appropriation is not only a thing of the past but, indeed, not even possible any longer.

In place of wars based on political antagonism, Kojève comes to believe that the post-war world order is based solely on relations of economic competition organised through (private) legal interactions. Echoing comments that he made in his lectures in the 1930s, he contends that "there is no longer any 'taking'" and all that remains is production and distribution (ibid., p 94). In other words, conflicts between friend and enemy have been transformed into competition between producers and consumers. Kojève admits that it took him several years of work in the French ministry in order to come to this conclusion: "When I entered the modern democratic 'state' after the war as a bureaucrat, foreign trade still involved foreign policy; however, after several years, I began to realise that there was no longer any state at all." Practical experience in the post-war world had shown that what seemed to be political tensions between East and West were only a veil that masked the fact that "foreign 'policy' had only one goal: to rid the world of politics (= war)" (ibid., p. 98). Consolidation of East-West political hostilities into economic competition meant for Kojève that wars and politics are absorbed by bureaucratic administration and police that seek to pacify the depoliticised masses. The *nomos* of the earth no longer includes appropriation for the simple reason that "states no longer exist" (ibid., p. 104).[121]

Interestingly, Schmitt agreed with Kojève on this point. Responding to Kojève's criticism, he writes that "it is all over with the 'state,' that is true; this mortal God is dead,

[121] This is an argument that Kojève repeats many times throughout his corpus in reference to the end of history thesis. In the *IRH*, Kojève argues that the political dimension of humanity is only possible where "there are, or—at least—where there have been, bloody fights, wars for prestige" (Kojève, 1980, p. 41).

nothing can be changed about that; the present-day, modern administration-apparatus of the "welfare (*Fursorge*) of Dasein" is not a 'state' in Hegel's sense"—that is to say, "no longer capable of making war" and, therefore, "no longer capable of making history" (ibid., p. 101). Nevertheless, Schmitt argues that the "contemporary world-dualism (of East and West, or land and sea) does not necessarily lead to a pacified unification of humanity. The end of history, for Schmitt, is not an inevitability. The intermediary stage between nations and humanity has not yet been overcome; the *katechon* is still occupied. For Schmitt, "disputations over *Grossraum*" maintain the political tension necessary for a "meaningful enmity that is, hence, historically noteworthy—an opposition to the unity of the world, i.e. against the assumption that the cycle of time is already over" (ibid., p. 102). The Schmitt-Kojève correspondence takes place at the precipice of the end. As Cacciari intimates, Schmitt holds onto the idea of the *katechon* that holds open the circle of history while Kojève's end of history thesis represents the abandonment of this possibility. If, according to Schmitt, someone or something must continue to hold the place of *katechon* in order for humanity to continue to exist, then Kojève's response would seem to be to say that the *katechon* is now empty, the end of history has arrived.

In the time between writing his *OPR* and his letters to Schmitt, it is clear that Kojève's thinking undergoes a complete about-face. As we have seen, in his *LE*, Kojève had argued for the impossibility of leaping straight from the nation to the global state without first passing through an age of empires. This observation is what compelled him to proffer a model describing a specifically "Latin" empire. Nevertheless, in his first communications with Schmitt in 1955, he admits that "one needs the 'Roman' anachronism of Mussolini's Italian foolishness in the 20th century to believe that the Mediterranean is still a political phenomenon" (ibid., p. 99). And even though in the early 1940s Kojève's writings contained the idea of a global state, we saw how he was still uncertain if, when, and how such an entity would emerge. In fact, in the *OPR*, he unequivocally asserts that "the universal and

homogenous state at the end of history does not yet exist" (Kojève, 2000, p. 310). Yet, in his letter to Schmitt he concedes that "after 10-20 years" it is has become "obvious" that the world had become more universal and homogeneous because "everybody wants, of course, the same thing, namely nothing; for they are, by and large, if not satisfied [*befriedigt*] at least contented [*zufrieden*]" (Kojève & Schmitt, 2001, p. 99).[122] Yet, this is precisely the kind of contentment that Kojève (at least in *LE*) wanted desperately to avoid—a contentment that verges on apolitical pacification.

Kojève reflects on this vision of pacified humanity that is content with "grazing" in a footnote added to the second edition of the *IRH* in 1962.

> several voyages of comparison made (between 1948 and 1958) to the United States and the U.S.S.R. gave me the impression that if the Americans give the appearance of rich Sino-Soviets, it is because the Russians and the Chinese are only Americans who are still poor but are rapidly proceeding to get richer. I was led to conclude from this that the "American way of life" was the type of life specific to the post-historical period, the actual presence of the United States in the World prefiguring the "eternal present" future of all of humanity (Kojève, 1980, p. 161).

The eternal present takes the form of eternal peace. Pacified and satiated, *Homo sapiens* have become *homo economicus*. Wars between political friend and enemy is replaced by battles in the boardroom where economic competitors compete over control of industry. Whether in America, Russia, China, or anywhere else, "the goal is—unfortunately!—*homogeneous* distribution. Whoever attains it first will be 'the last'" (Kojève & Schmitt, 2001, p. 95). In his book, *Battling to the End*, René Girard argues that in the post-war era of globalisation, wars have been replaced by a kind of mimetic substitute: "the looming conflict between the United States and China, for example, has nothing to do with a 'clash of civilizations,' despite what

[122] Similarly, commenting on a footnote attached to his lectures on Hegel, Kojève wrote: "At the period when I wrote the above note (1946), Man's return to animality did not appear unthinkable to me as a prospect for the future (more or less near). But shortly afterwards (1948) I understood that the Hegelian-Marxist end of History was not yet to come, but was already a present, here and now" (Kojève, 1980, p. 160).

some might try to tell us. We always try to see differences where in fact there are none" (Girard, 2010, p. 42). For Girard, what seems to be a brewing war between two nations is, in fact, merely an economic dispute between two forms of capitalism that, moreover, are becoming increasingly similar. This only repeats something that Kojève was already saying during the Cold War: "Molotov's Cowboy hat is the symbol of the future" (Kojève & Schmitt, 2001, p. 103).[123]

Kojève describes this transition from political tensions to economic competition as a return to animality:

> after the end of History, men would construct their edifices and works of art as birds build their nests and spiders spin their webs, would perform musical concerts after the fashion of frogs and cicadas, would play like young animals, and would indulge in love like adult beasts. But one cannot then say that all this "makes Man happy." One would have to say that post-historical animals of the species *Homo sapiens* (which will live amidst abundance and complete security) will be content as a result of their playful behaviour, inasmuch as, by definition, they will be contented with it (Kojève, 1980, p. 159).

Even though it stands at exactly the opposite pole of Schmitt's civil wars, the end of history for Kojève is equally apocalyptic. The arrival of the universal and homogeneous empire is concomitant with the death of man: the "*definitive annihilation* of Man *properly so-called*" (ibid., p. 160). The eternal peace that is revealed at the end of history must therefore be understood in the idea of eternal rest—to rest in peace. But to *speak* of the "end" in this way begs the question: if Kojève is correct and humankind has reached its definitive end, then how

[123] This is a reference to then Soviet Foreign minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, who, in an international conference in 1955 appeared wearing a western-style cowboy hat and allegedly refused to answer questions that were not given in advance. General Carlos Romula, the Philippines special envoy to the US, said that Molotov's gesture was part of a "new ten-gallon hat strategy" to consolidate interests between the East and West following Stalin's death and warned that the "old" Molotov would be back again if a strongman became dominant in the Soviet Union again. See, "Molotov's 'hat strategy' criticised." *The Canberra Times*, 28 June 1955, https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/91204053.

does one speak about it at all? As Kojève himself claims, the transition to post-historical animality "would also means the definitive disappearance of human discourse (*logos*) in the strict sense. What would disappear, then, is not only philosophy or the search for discursive wisdom, but also that wisdom itself. For in these post-historical animals, there would no longer be any *understanding* of the world and of self" (ibid.). In the absence of both wisdom and philosophy, lacking an understanding of both self and world, how does one nevertheless manage to communicate this ignorance? But is Kojève affirming that the human being has already been annihilated or, rather, is he, like Saint Paul, merely prophesising this outcome as a potential future? Is Kojève, in fact, claiming to be speaking as a post-historical animal or is his speech itself evidence that the *katechon* is still in place?

As we have seen, Kojève is constantly shifting his position on how and when the universal and homogeneous state appears. But even when he seems to have made his decision by proclaiming the actualisation of the end in the footnote that I just cited, he immediately backtracks on his pronouncement of "the definitive annihilation of man" in order to leave room for man to continue to live life at the horizon of the end:

> It was following a recent voyage to Japan (1959) that I had a radical change of opinion on this point. There I was able to observe a Society that is one of a kind, because it alone has for almost three centuries experienced life at the "end of History"—that is, in the absence of all civil or external war (ibid., p. 161).

In a way diametrically opposed to the "American way of life" as post-historical animals, Kojève argues that the Japanese maintain a precarious human existence at the precipice of the end by living "according to totally *formalised* values—that is, values completely empty of all 'human' content in the 'historical' sense" (ibid., p. 162). *Homo sapiens* is, thus, able to persist as human at the horizon of the end only by performing meaningless activities that Kojève says are akin to a kind of snobbery. But what is important for our discussion is the rearticulation of

the end as a non-end—or, perhaps, as an *ending*—which reveals a radical *indecisiveness* at the end of history.

In fact, at the same time that Fukuyama was writing his interpretation of Kojève's end of history thirty years ago, Jean Baudrillard was already describing "a paradoxical process of reversal," where history, having reached its limit, escapes its own end (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 11). For Baudrillard, the leap required to reach the end is likened to jumping over one's shadow: "It means the abolition of death as vital horizon. It means losing your shadow. And so it means the impossibility of jumping over that shadow—how can you jump over your shadow when you no longer have one?" (ibid., p. 102). For Baudrillard, Kojève only takes us to the precipice of the end but no further. That is to say, there is a kind of *katechontic* suspension at play in Kojève's end of history itself. The problem is not whether or not the end of history has arrived or when it will arrive; but rather what does it mean to arrive at the end, at any end at all, at an end *in general*? Kojève's particular vacillations as they are revealed in his political writings push us to a more general problem. There is a structure of indecision that resides in the core of Kojève's philosophy itself, one that results in a tension at the site of completion. As we have already seen in the first and second chapters, like the *katechon*, Kojève's thinking pushes us toward the end while, at the same time, stubbornly refusing to allow for its actualisation. There is an essential aporia concerning the completion of philosophy at work in Kojève's end of history thesis: it remains trapped within a *katechontic* push and pull which tries to bring about the same end that it withholds. It is this restraining force internal to Kojève's thought that I will investigate in the final two chapters of the thesis. The question I put to Kojève is the same one asked by Baudrillard: how does one jump over one's shadow when you no longer have one?

Chapter 4: Gap in the System. A reading of Kant's Critical philosophy

4.1. Introduction: The Kant *brouillon*

Beginning in the 1950s, Kojève set himself the task of "updating" Hegel. He explains that his expansive commentary on the *PhS* that he delivered in a series of seminars between 1933 and 1939, was the first stage of this exposition—only an *initial* step toward the larger project of presenting a complete "System of Knowledge" (*Système du Savoir*).[124] In the *IRH*, he claims that certain elements of Hegel's philosophy were unsatisfactory and corrective measures were therefore required. His principle point of contention was (what he saw as) Hegel's guiding assumption of ontological monism. He explains how, in his opinion, Hegel had committed a "basic error" (*erreur de base*) by assuming both nature and history were of one and the same ontological kind (Kojève, 1980, p. 146). Moreover, he considered the rectification of this "error" to be the "the principle philosophical task of the future"—a correction which required restructuring Hegel's ontology into a dualistic framework, one that adequately distinguished between a non-dialectical natural and a dialectical human historical being. While certain sections in the *IRH* delineate the contours of this problem in order to prepare the way towards a solution, as Kojève himself conceded, "almost nothing had yet been done" (ibid., p. 215). Spring boarding off this admission, commentators have been inclined to situate his post-war work of Hegel within the ambit of this same philosophical task; however, in a preface which introduces his "attempt at an updating of the Hegelian System of Knowledge", Kojève makes

[124] Kojève says that his *Introduction* is an attempt to present an interpretation of one aspect of this system—namely its first, introductory part—through his expansive commentary on the *PhS.* As Terry Pinkard notes, "[Hegel] thought of [the *PhS*] as the basic introduction to his entire proposed system" (Pinkard, 2018, p. xix). Indeed, Hegel originally entitled the work, "System of Science: First Part: The Phenomenology of Spirit" (ibid., p. xvi).

no mention of "ontological dualism" nor even an "error" in Hegel's philosophy. Instead, he says that his update aims only to show that "it is materially impossible to say anything other and more than what Hegel has already said" and, thus, the only question that arises in his attempt to construct a complete Hegelian *Système du Savoir* is whether or not he was able to recapitulate the totality of the Hegelian "discourse" in a French translation (Kojève, 2019, p. 3). Consequently, our own attempt to understand Kojève's update of Hegel inevitably needs to contend with this tension: how to square the seemingly contradictory position that posits the presence of a "basic error" in Hegel's philosophy while, at the same time, claiming that this same philosophy is, in fact, complete?

In the same preface that introduces Kojève's project of "repeating everything that Hegel has already said", he also apologises for the inadequacy of its presentation which "contains numerous imperfections, not only of form but as regards content as well." The same project whose aim is to demonstrate the completion of the Hegelian system is itself presented in a "badly written book" that was "written in haste" (ibid., p. 1). Is Kojève being insincere and immodest, or does this admission point to a more general problematic confronting his update of the Hegelian system? Indeed, Kojève's update of Hegel draws us into a web of questions. What does it mean to *attempt* to show the completion of a system? Does the systematicity of system become undone by way of its provisional character? Moreover, what does it mean to *update* a system that has said everything it can say? Does such exhaustion not preclude its own revision?[125] It will be the aim of the final two chapters of the thesis to unravel these questions.

[125] As Pirotte contends that "everything seems to work together to distract and discourage the reader from the seriousness of the undertaking; everything seems to get lost in the appendix. Is Kojève's implicit wager not also to bear witness, by effacing himself, to the fact that his discourse has already been pronounced, without him, by the objective, irrepressible necessity of a movement that history operates both in act and in its concept, under the virtuous mask of the useless 'para-phrase'? A 'para-phrase', however, unheard of in the history of twentieth-century ideas, forcing the Discourse into an 'interminable task', anamnesis, inviting its infinite updating. It is an undertaking that places Kojève, in his own right, in the unique position of a secret but essential figure in contemporary philosophy" (Pirotte, 2005, p. 27).

In doing so, I will show that Kojève's work on Hegel becomes ensnared in the same problem of completion that persists throughout his corpus.

Like nearly all of Kojève's works, his attempt at an update of Hegel remained incomplete and (with the exception of one part) unpublished in his lifetime. However, unlike the other texts that we have encountered so far, we know that Kojève *did* in fact intend to publish this particular project in its entirety. Despite admitting to its various shortcomings, Kojève wrote that it is "the reader who will ultimately judge the value of this book […] after the publication of its final (and fifth) volume at a date which is, moreover, quite undetermined" (Kojève, 2019, p. 1). A clue as to why Kojève may have changed his attitude towards publishing his, admittedly unfinished, work can be found within this voluminous tome itself where we find the following reflection:

> Serious philosophers have generally refrained from publishing (themselves) their "drafts" [*brouillons*], i.e., the (successive or parallel) still too imperfect versions of the exposition which is supposed to be perfect (or the one they consider to be the last of those that they are likely to be able to elaborate themselves). It is only since Schelling that one has done an "apprenticeship in public" (as has been said of him) showing that it is good form to "evolve" even in philosophy (Kojève, 1968, p. 183).

Schelling's influence provides a rare insight into the development of a philosophical vocabulary. In an ideal world it is perhaps best to refrain from publishing "imperfect" material, holding off until one has a more complete system prepared. Based on Kojève's reluctance to publish, we can surmise that this was the attitude that he held for most of his life. Yet, it is by reflecting on Schelling's example that Kojève comes to acknowledge a fault in this outlook. For he concedes that "no philosopher has been able to avoid the need to work out his system gradually and to constantly rework the statements already made, as its very development progresses" (ibid.). A philosophical system is not something that can be gift-wrapped and presented as already complete. Rather, if there is a "systematicity" in Kojève's philosophy it is

found precisely in the gradual development of a thought that problematises the very meaning of completion. Doing an "apprenticeship in public" means to demonstrate that the evolution of the "system" is not different from the system itself.

Kojève's own understanding of system follows directly from Hegel who describes system as a movement which develops through various stages and determinations of the concept toward a fully determined "concept of the concept" (Hegel, 2010b, p. 526). In his seminars, Kojève claims that "absolute knowledge is nothing other than the complete System of Hegelian philosophy or 'Science,' which Hegel expounded later in the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*" (Kojève, 1980, p. 31). The element of the *Encyclopaedia* that Kojève hones in on for his understanding of system is that of circularity. Recall, in this text, Hegel's famous description of philosophy as a "a circle coming to closure within itself" (Hegel, 2010, p. 45). Similarly, in the *Science of Logic*, Hegel explains that "essential to science is not so much that a pure immediacy should be the beginning, but that the whole of science is in itself a circle in which the first becomes also the last, and the last also the first" (Hegel, 2010b, p. 49). For Hegel, the system of science "presents itself as a circle that winds around itself, where the mediation winds the end back to the beginning which is the simple ground" (ibid., p. 751). Taking up this idea, Kojève claims that the system of knowledge is completed "only by being revealed as circular, which means that in developing it, one ends at the point from which one started" (Kojève, 1980, p. 90). Kojève's post-war update of Hegel is thus an attempt to retrace this circularity. In other words, if Hegelian philosophy offers a completed circuit—that is, if Hegel succeeded in presenting the stages of a historical becoming resulting in the actualization of knowledge in the form of a complete system—then, according to Kojève, an "update" of Hegel demands that the pathway itself, i.e., the entire history of Western philosophy, must be

revisited and grasped in light of its own completion.[126] What this entails is a re-telling of the history of philosophy, not as an unfolding of the absolute, but from the perspective of Hegelian wisdom itself: "a Hegelian manner of re-presenting the history of philosophy that stretches from Thales up to and including Hegel" (Kojève, 1968, p. 191). Despite being incomplete, this project is extraordinary for its scope and ambition. The plan was to begin with a history of "pagan" philosophy (beginning with Thales and extending through to Neo-Platonism), followed by its "Judeo-Christian" period leading up to and including Kant, before ending with a text on Hegel himself, more specifically, a reading of his *Encyclopaedia*. However, as we will see, Kojève's update never reached a velocity that allows it to escape its preparatory stage as an *introduction* to the *Système du Savoir*.[127]

In total, Kojève would manage to write nearly 2000 pages spanning five separate volumes. The first volume, what is referred to as *The Concept, Time, and Discourse* (*CTD*), begins with the aforementioned preface, followed by an "introduction to the introduction to the system" which consists of an "introduction to the title of the work itself" along with three more introductions (Kojève, 2019, p. 37). The first two of these introductions are found in *CTD* itself while the third "historical introduction" sprawls over 4 volumes. The first part of the third introduction (the only part that was published during Kojève's lifetime) is entitled, *Essai d'une histoire raisonnée de la philosophie païenne*, and it consists of three volumes covering the pre-Socratics, Plato and Aristotle, and, finally, Neo-Platonists. The second part, which was meant

[126] This demand that a philosophical system be able to grasp its own conditions of possibility is, incidentally, tied to Kojève's enigmatic criticism of Spinoza. In his *IRH*, Kojève argues that Spinoza's system can account for everything except for the flesh and bones author that writes it in space and time. He claims that there is an essential difference between Spinoza's and Hegel's ontology. Spinoza understands Being as eternity, whereas Hegel says that Being is time: "Consequently, Spinozist absolute Knowledge, too, must be Eternity; that is to say, that it must exclude time. In other words: there is no need of time to realize it; the *Ethics* must be thought, written, and read 'in a trice'. And that is the thing's absurdity" (Kojève, 1980, p. 118).

[127] As Jorge Varela puts it "the introduction may be a constitutive part of something to which it maintains no links […] It is from here that the particular role of the introduction comes forth [...] Until the arrival of that final exposition, the introduction will keep its full value in its disconnection. Moreover, the continual absence of that defining exposition renders any text as an introductory one" (Varela, 2018, p. 271).

to discuss "The Middle Ages and Pagan Philosophy's Being Placed into Opposition with Judeo-Christian Theology" and then "Modern Times and the Forerunners of Christian Philosophy", were never published and, to the best of my knowledge, never even written. That notwithstanding, Kojève explains that if he would have managed to finish his recapitulation of a Hegelian philosophy of history, the string of nested introductions would have served the purpose of understanding "the situation and role of Kant in the history of philosophy" (Kojève, 1968, p. 9). The fact that Kojève's attempt to construct a Hegelian *Système du Savoir* would result in an encounter with Kant is noteworthy in itself; but when we consider that this confrontation is itself nested within an update of Hegel, what Kojève places before us is not, strictly speaking, an investigation of Kant which anticipates Hegel but rather the reverse: a Kant that is methodically approached and interrogated in light of Hegel.

Surprisingly, the role and situation of Kant in Kojève's corpus has been rarely discussed in the context of Kojève studies.[128] This gap in our reading of Kojève is significant and made all the more remarkable given that he produced a 200 page manuscript, written between 1952 and 1956, specifically on Kant. The text, given the simple title, *Kant*, is a *brouillon* in the truest sense of the term. The first transcription, published in 1973, contains all the imperfections of the original, including typos, errors, convoluted sentences, and an overall argument that reads like a stream of consciousness.[129] Yet, as I will show, if one is able to look past some of the idiosyncrasies of style, it is obvious that this manuscript contains an innovative interpretation.[130] I contend that far from being a peripheral text that is embedded in his

[128] For example, in Filoni's otherwise comprehensive and detailed account of Kojève's philosophy, which was recently expanded upon in a second edition to include his political and philosophical activity from 1940 to 1968, the *Kant* manuscript is not mentioned at all.

[129] As of my writing of this thesis, there has not yet been an English translation of the Kant manuscript. All translations are my own.

[130] James H. Nichols, Jr., in a concise yet thorough summary of Kojève's corpus, makes one of the few references to *Kant*. However, in doing so, he repeats the common refrain that Kojève was only really interested in Hegel (Nichols, 2007, p. 106). Similarly, Patrick Riley claims that Kojève offers a "limited" reading of Kant refracted through a Marxist lens (Riley, 1981). In doing so, they only repeat what is a commonly held belief—one that is,

"historical introduction" of his update of Hegel, this text is one of the most important in Kojève's corpus. It is through this reading that we gain a clearer idea of not only what is meant by philosophy in the context of Kojève's thinking but, more importantly, the *limits* of this philosophy.

Kojève orients our reading of Kant's Critical philosophy through the lens of a gap in the circular path that completes the system. The investigation of the gap directs us to the core problem animating Kojève's update of Hegel. Kojève claims that for a philosophy to reach the status of system, it must be presented as a complete discourse. Throughout both his lectures on Hegel and his later update, Kojève claims that the Hegelian *Système du Savoir* is precisely the articulation of a circular philosophical discourse, the completion of which announces the end of history. Yet, in order to understand the nature of this closure, we must first understand what is meant, precisely, by "discourse" in this context. Despite its centrality and importance, little effort has been made to critically assess the significance of this term.[131] As I will show in this chapter, it is not in his lectures on Hegel that we find an initial response to this question but rather in his reading of Kant as it appears in his update of Hegel.

4.2. Origins of the Gap: A tantalising pain

In mid-September 1798, Kant received a letter from his friend Christian Garve who had complained that he was battling a cancer that had caused him to lose sight in one eye and had

in my opinion, misguided—that all of Kojève's work has a reading of Hegel as its ultimate goal. While Kojève does indicate that his reading of Kant is related to his reading of Hegel, there is also at play a detailed engagement with Kantian philosophy. Even a cursory reading reveals that Kojève is a serious reader of Kant. He quotes widely from the *Akademieausgabe* (supplying his own translation into the French) while weaving an elaborate reconstruction of the three *Critiques* in order to redraw the connection between Kant and Hegel—unfortunately, owing to the breadth of his reading, I will only be able to gesture at its full scope here.

[131] Despite the depth in which Pirotte analyses the unfolding of Kojève's discursive development of the Hegelian concept, little time is spent on the explication of what is meant, specifically, by discourse in this context. Instead, Pirotte repeats Kojève's own idiosyncratic language leading him to assert that it is "within a discourse of some kind that the System of Knowledge, or philosophical discourse properly speaking, begins" (Pirotte, 2005, p. 118).

decimated the right side of his face. Needless to say, he was in considerable pain. A few days later Kant responded by saying that he had also been suffering, not from any physical ailment, but from something, at least in his mind, even more severe—an incomplete philosophical system:

> The description of your physical suffering affected me deeply, and your strength of mind in ignoring that pain and continuing cheerfully to work for the good of mankind rouses the highest admiration in me. I wonder though whether my own fate, involving a similar striving, would not seem to you even more painful if you were to put yourself in my place. For I am as it were mentally paralyzed even though physically I am reasonably well. I see before me the unpaid bill of my uncompleted philosophy, even while I am aware that philosophy, both as regards its means and its ends, is capable of completion. It is a pain like that of Tantalus though not a hopeless pain (Kant, 1999, p. 551).

The comparison of Garve's cancer to the incompletion of his philosophy certainly lacks empathy, if not tact.[132] At the same time, it demonstrates just how much the problem of systematic completion preoccupied Kant later in his life. The source of his "mental paralysis" was the same as the site of his pain: a gap (*Lücke*) remained in his philosophy, an interruption that prevented his system from reaching completion.

Kant insists that his suffering was the result of something even worse than physical pain, which is strange considering that, unlike Garve (who died a few weeks after this exchange), he could rely on a *hope* that one day his pain would wither away and be replaced with philosophical satisfaction. Kant was obsessed with the idea that his philosophical project could and, indeed, must be completed. Only a few weeks later, in a letter to Johann Kiesewetter, Kant explained that he would devote his remaining years to this goal, using his last "little bit

[132] Although, I should mention that according to Thomas de Quincey's portrait in *The Last Days of Immanuel Kant*, Kant had a singular way of expressing sympathy towards his friends in sickness: "So long as the danger was imminent, he testified a restless anxiety, made perpetual inquiries, waited with impatience for the crisis, and sometimes could not pursue his customary labours from agitation of mind" (Quincey, 1862, p. 113).

of strength to complete the work at hand; with that work the task of the critical philosophy will be completed and the gap that now stands will be filled" (Kant, 1999, p. 553). But besides these two letters and a few scattered comments, Kant was reticent about the state of completion of his philosophy and, hence, the status of the gap. For instance, in the Introduction to the A edition of the first *Critique*, Kant distinguishes between the completion of the transcendental philosophy and the completion of his system: "the critique of pure reason there accordingly belongs everything that constitutes transcendental philosophy, and it is the complete idea of transcendental philosophy, but is not yet this science itself" (Kant, 1998, p. 134). So, when in the third *Critique* he writes that he had brought his "entire critical undertaking to a close", it is an ambiguous statement (Kant, 2001, p. 58). Did he mean that only the Critical philosophy was complete, while the system remained unfinished? If so, how to understand this difference? These questions are not easily answered, especially when considered alongside other comments such as his 1799 letter to Fichte where he, in fact, insisted that not only the Transcendental philosophy, but his system itself was complete.[133] There is thus an uncertainty, not only for scholars but even in Kant himself regarding the question of completion. It is for this reason that we must continue to ask: what exactly is this gap that Kant says is the source of his pain?[134]

[133] "I must remark here that the assumption that I have intended to publish only a propaedeutic to transcendental philosophy and not the actual system of this philosophy is incomprehensible to me. Such an intention could never have occurred to me, since I took the completeness of pure philosophy within the *Critique of Pure Reason* to be the best indication of the truth of my work… the critical philosophy must remain confident of its irresistible propensity to satisfy the theoretical as well as the moral, practical purposes of reason, confident that no change of opinions, no touching up or reconstruction into some other form, is in store for it; the system of the *Critique* rests on a fully secured foundation, established forever; it will be indispensable tool for the noblest ends of mankind in all future ages" (Kant, 1999, p. 560).

[134] To be sure, there is more than one possible way to understand the "gap". For instance, in his letters to both Garve and Kiesewetter, Kant mentions how he has embarked upon a new work entitled, "Transition [*Übergang*] from the Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science to Physics." The implication of the *Übergang* is that there is a something that must be "passed over" or "transitioned across". It is therefore unsurprising that commentators have sought to solve the riddle of Kant's dissatisfaction by looking to his later writings, more specifically, the collected papers referred to as the *Opus postumum* (*OP*) which contain drafts concerned with the "Transition" project. In fact, in the fifth leaf of fascicle IV (echoing comments found throughout *OP*) Kant writes, "there is a gap to be filled between the metaphysical foundations of natural science and physics; its filling is called a transition from one to the other" (OP 21: 482). Yet, even within this specific mention of a gap there remains

Yet, in the midst of trying to think the *topos* of the gap—namely, how it might be filled or bridged (a project that has occupied many a Kantian scholar)—a more fundamental question has been lying in wait: what exactly is a gap, philosophically speaking? And related to this—a problem that will situate Kojève's own relation to Kant—what does it mean to fill in a gap? That is to say, what does it mean for philosophy to be capable of completion? What are the consequences for a philosophy that announces its own end? Attempting to answer these questions, Kojève thematizes the gap in Kant in his unpublished manuscript, *Kant*, in which he inscribes Kant into his "Hegelian" philosophy of history by problematizing the very notion of end.[135]

Now, as we saw in his letter to Garve, Kant insisted that his Critical philosophy was *capable* of closure and to this end Kant says that "philosophy is the idea of a perfect wisdom, which shows us the final ends of human reason" (Kant, 1992, p. 538). That is to say, there is an implicit requirement in philosophy, specifically the Critical philosophy, to strive for "systematic" completion. Yet, at least in the view of his successors (Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and others, including Kojève), Kant's philosophy was unable to satisfy this requirement. Although largely unexplored, one of the most important features of Kojève's

considerable disagreement regarding its form, place, and nature. Some of the suggestions include: the gap between the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (*MF*) and empirical physics (Hoppe, 1969); a gap in the *MF* itself (Edmundts, 2004); a gap opened up in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (*CJ*) (Mathieu, 1989); the status of the chemical in Kant's "material" philosophy of nature in light of advances in the empirical sciences (Friedman, 2015); the gap left by a supposed "Transcendental Dynamics" (Tuschling, 1971); a gap left by substance in the first *Critique* (Hall, 2017); and a combination of all of these (Förster, 2000). Lost in these debates, however, is the question as to whether the gap described in the *OP* is even the same one that is described in his letters. Is this gap between the metaphysical foundations of natural science and the physics of his day really the gap that Kant anguished over? Is the "transition" described in the OP really enough to cover the costs of the unpaid bill of his philosophy? Or was this attempt at a transition merely an anaesthesia that could only ever hope to temporarily alleviate his tantalising torment? These specific questions regarding *OP* are beyond the scope of my investigation; nevertheless, they push us toward a more rudimentary inquiry which will be our focus.

[135] Despite his reputation as a Hegelian, Kojève actually began his philosophical career immersed with Kant. He received instruction from both Heinrich Rickert and Karl Jaspers in the early 1920s in Heidelberg. In addition to Rickert, Kojève also followed the lectures of Heinrich Maier for two semesters where he studied the three *Critiques* systematically in connection to the work of Ernst Cassirer and Bruno Bauch. For more on Kojève's association with neo-Kantianism see (Filoni, 2021, pp. 92-105).

thought is his distinction between philosophy and system. For Kojève, there is a gap between philosophy and system, the elimination of which "transforms philosophy, or the search for truth, into a system of knowledge which is this truth itself" (Kojève, 1973, p. 212). According to Kojève, having removed the gap in the Kantian philosophy, Hegel became the first to arrive at a system. The singularity of this achievement is referred to by several names in Kojève's work, such as science, wisdom, absolute knowledge, and the end of history. Although each term has its own specific meaning in Kojève's thought, they all signify the completion of philosophy—that is, the shift from the desire for "*Sophia*" to its actualization. In the *IRH*, Kojève goes into great detail explaining how Hegel achieved what eluded Kant. In *Kant*, he takes a different approach. Instead of showing the shortcomings of the Kantian philosophy with respect to the Hegelian system, he asks what it was that prevented Kant from completing his philosophy. Why does wisdom for Kant remain only an "idea" instead of an actuality? Or, said differently, why do the "ends" of reason remain ends in the sense of a *telos* and not also an end in the sense of *finis?* It is with these questions in mind that we must approach Kojève's reading of Kant; that is, as an interrogation of the tension between philosophy and system—a tension revealed, moreover, through the presence of a gap at the heart of Transcendental idealism.

In the section of the Transcendental Dialectic entitled "On the Paralogisms of Pure Reason", Kant defines Transcendental idealism as "the doctrine that all appearances are to be regarded as mere representation and not as things in themselves" (Kant, 1998, p. 426). This "transcendental distinction" between appearances and things in themselves is the ground of the entire Critical edifice and is tied to the division Kant makes between theoretical knowledge of nature and practical freedom of human morality—that is, between the sensible and the suprasensible. On the one hand, the phenomenal world of appearances, or objects of possible experience, is known objectively as determined by the mechanistic laws of cause and effect; on the other hand, freedom is tethered to an unknowable thing-in-itself located in a noumenal

beyond, completely opposed to the sensible world of experience, legislated by a universal moral law. These two domains are separated by a gap, an "incalculable gulf" between nature and freedom (Kant, 2001, p. 63). This gap has been the target of discussion ever since Kant announced it in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (*CPR*). Since then, numerous interpretations and criticisms have been made of the split between what Kojève will call "spatio-temporal" appearances and "non-spatio-temporal" things in themselves. Yet, despite all of the ink spilled on this topic, Kojève wagers that "the question of the role that the notion of the thing-in-itself plays in Kant's 'system' is sufficiently complex and important for it to be worthwhile to ponder extensively" (Kojève, 1973, p. 11). And, as the inverted commas imply, it is here that he begins to call into question the status of the Kantian *system* itself. For Kojève, the thing-in-itself enters the architecture of the Critical philosophy at the site of the gap: serving as an indispensable element in reason's pursuit of completion as well as an obstacle towards that same end.

It should be pointed out that the idea that a gap lurks at the heart of the Critical edifice, both holding it together and tearing it apart, was invested from the start with a meaning that it did not necessarily have for Kant. Kant insisted that his philosophical successors were prone to "find inconsistencies everywhere, although the gaps [*Lücken*] they suppose they find are not in the system itself but only in their own incoherent train of thought" (Kant, 2015, p. 8). Considering that Kant himself claimed (as we have seen from his private correspondences) that his philosophy contained a gap, it is not surprising that his protest was largely disregarded by his critics. The early German idealists, like almost all the immediate post-Kantians, engaged in a short but exuberant span of philosophical activity that tarried with the incalculable gulf at the heart of transcendental idealism, and thus focused a great deal of their energy on how to traverse the problematic of the thing-in-itself.

Despite criticism, K. L. Reinhold was the first to try and furnish the gap with a bridge that would systematize the Critical framework.[136] As such, he became one of the first in a long line of thinkers who attempted to reformulate the Critical philosophy according to its spirit even if this meant disregarding its letter. Reinhold was of the mind that the presuppositions upon which the Critical philosophy is premised can be set out in such a way as to construct a completed system; but the presence of the thing-in-itself remained stubborn, even paradoxical: it is precisely what enters the Critical philosophy as a foreign entity, an exception, that nevertheless serves as its condition of possibility. The thing-in-itself is simultaneously constitutive and destructive of the Critical foundation. That is to say, there is a gap in the Critical philosophy preventing its completion, yet the Critical philosophy cannot do without this gap. This aporia is captured by Jacobi's famous aphorism that says without the presupposition of the thing-in-itself one is unable to enter into the Kantian system, yet with such a presupposition one is unable to stay within it.

Although Kojève would move in a different direction than Reinhold, Kojève recognized the basic impact of his approach.[137] What makes Reinhold important for Kojève is how he

[136] In their shared correspondence, both Fichte and Schelling made their thoughts on Reinhold known. Schelling referred to Reinhold as a "wind tossed reed"; in response, Fichte suggested a "complete break with that pitiful creature" (Schelling & Fichte, 2012, pp. 21-22). If it were possible, Hegel was perhaps even more severe than his predecessors calling Reinhold's writings "bits of contemporary flotsam in time's stream" (Hegel, 1977, p. 82). Although originally impressed by Reinhold, even Kant seemed to eventually succumb to this general sentiment. In the same letter written to Kiesewetter in 1798 mentioned at the beginning of this article, Kant writes how he had "just received the news (though not yet sufficiently authenticated) that Reinhold has recently changed his mind again, abandoned Fichte's principles", but in typically sober Kantian fashion he vowed to "remain a silent spectator to this game and leave the scoring to younger more vigorous minds" (Kant, 1999, p. 553). In fact, Kojève is rather disparaging of Reinhold. "In the history of Philosophy, the elimination [of the gap] seems to have been made for the first time by an otherwise mediocre thinker named Reinhold and it has been repeated several times by German thinkers" (Kojève, 1973, p. 199). Reinhold was quite ambiguous where the spirit/letter distinction is concerned with Kant. Wavering between both positions, he started out as a strict adherent to the letter of the Kantian philosophy in the book that, interestingly, first popularised Kant, *Letters on Kantian Philosophy*. Only later did he shift to less literal reading of Kant when he embraced a more "Fichtean" approach in *Elementarphilosophie*.

[137] In this way, and despite his criticism, Kojève shares Karl Ameriks view that "Fichte, Schelling, Schiller, Hölderlin, Novalis, and Friedrich Schlegel all developed their thought in reaction to Reinhold's reading of Kant" (Ameriks, 2005, p. xl).

initiated a debate regarding the potential for a systematic grounding of the Critical philosophy based on what was (and has become) an overlooked part of the *CPR*, namely, the "Architectonic of Pure Reason", contained in the Transcendental Doctrine of Method. Noting the lack of scholarship on this corner of Kant's philosophy, Kojève claims that to understand the *CPR* one must begin at the end: "without the 'Transcendental Methodology' of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant's System can hardly be understood; nevertheless, it is very little read, rarely commented on and almost never interpreted" (Kojève, 1973, pp. 25-26). And yet "beginning at the end" is not merely a provocation, for Kojève provides concrete reasons for centralizing the final sections of the *CPR*, asserting that "what Kant reveals in his 'Methodology' is of such philosophical importance that it is indispensable" (ibid., p. 59). Adopting Reinhold's centralization of the concluding part of the *CPR*, Kojève consciously opposed what had become the commonly held belief, at least in the 20th-century, that the Doctrine of Method is an expendable part of Critical philosophy.[138] As we will see, it is Kojève's contention that even though Kant was unable to *actualize* his idea of system, the Architectonic is essential for understanding how he outlined the *potential* for such a system.

It is part of Kant's intent in the *Critique* to ascertain how metaphysics is possible as a "science" or, what is the same thing, how the systematization of knowledge under a single idea is to be made possible. This possibility, expressed throughout the Critical philosophy, is most

[138] For instance, C.D Broad had no issues writing in 1941 that "it is to be feared that most of us, unless we are professional students of Kant, have rather flagged before reaching page 570 of Kemp Smith's translation and are inclined to give ourselves a holiday on the plea that the rest of the book is just 'Kant's architectonic'" (Broad, 1942, p. 1). To wit, Kemp Smith himself confined his analysis of this part of the *CPR* to a twenty-page appendix, remarking that "the entire teaching of his *Methodology* has already been more or less exhaustively expounded in the earlier divisions of the *Critique*" (Smith, 2003, p. 563). To be sure, Kemp Smith did little to hide his contempt for this section of the CPR and is, therefore, not necessarily the most reputable source for commentary on this particular aspect of Kant's corpus. At the same time, Kant scholars influenced by Kemp Smith's reading of the Architectonic continue to scorn or ignore this section of the *CPR*. Thus, despite Kant's emphasis, expressed most forcefully in the Architectonic, that he was attempting to set out a complete system of philosophy, many readers of Kant would agree with Kemp Smith that the first *Critique* was not, in fact, intended as the exposition of a single unified system (Palmquist, 1986, p. 267).

explicitly targeted in the Architectonic where Kant outlines "the determination of the formal conditions of a complete system" (Kant, 1998, p. 627). Kant begins the third chapter of the architectonic of pure reason by giving us his definition of system as "the unity of the manifold cognitions under one idea" (ibid., p. 691). The ambit of the Architectonic is to provide the systematisation of metaphysics according to the limits set by the first *Critique*—that is, theoretical knowledge. The need for unity arises from the demands of reason which strives for completion; however, in striving for completion, theoretical reason overextends itself, spilling over into a domain that is foreign to it (i.e., the Transcendental Dialectic). Reason, confronted with its own condition of possibility as the negative horizon of possible experience, comes face to face with a noumenal beyond; and all that theoretical reason can do is claim that, as the limits of possible experience, nothing can be known. Yet, in making this gesture, a door is opened to practical reason. Different from the theoretical, the practical use of reason does not have knowledge of its object, which means that while we can certainly *think* the noumenal, we are blocked off from *knowing* its source as a thing in itself. It is within this difference that a gap is opened between the realm of mechanistic nature and human freedom. Consequently, in order to meet the demands of architectonic unity, this gap that is situated at the horizon that divides between phenomena (set within the bounds of sensibility and understanding) and noumena (which exceed the limits of possible experience)—i.e., nature and freedom—must be filled.

The self-legislation of human reason is disjointed between phenomenal necessity and noumenal freedom. Yet, there remains, as Kant says in the second *Critique*, "the expectation of perhaps being able someday to attain insight into the unity of the entire pure power of reason (theoretical as well as practical) and to derive everything from one principle—this being the unavoidable need of human reason, which finds full satisfaction only in a completely systematic unity of its cognitions" (Kant, 2015, p. 74). Given the separation between the two spheres, Kant suggests that the only way to unify the theoretical with the practical is through a

concept of freedom that has an "intelligible cause" (as opposed to a mechanical, natural cause) with phenomenal effects. The question is whether such a concept of freedom can "form the keystone of the whole edifice of a system of pure reason" (ibid., p. 3). It is the task of the third (and to some extent, the second) *Critique* to show that this is the case. Kojève, for his part, claims that "Kant had the enormous merit" of having explicated a concept of freedom in light of natural necessity. However, he also points out that this "solution" ultimately manages to only camouflage over the gap in the Critical edifice without actually filling it (Kojève, 1973, p. 104). In other words, practical reason, according to Kojève, can only say that one is able to act "as-if" free action is possible in light of natural necessity and, hence, Kant only manages to "mask the gap" that stands in the way of philosophical completion (ibid., p. 112). I will return shortly to Kojève's interpretation of the role of the "as-if" in the Critical philosophy (a term that Kojève knowingly borrows from Hans Vaihinger); but, for now, it is important that we acknowledge the links that Kojève's analysis shares with German idealism.

The German idealists accepted Kant's demand that the Critical philosophy must be made systematic; but they also contended that Kant failed in his attempt to do so. In their eyes, the attempt to unify the gap between the theoretical and practical spheres under a single principle requires that one discards the thing-in-itself entirely and thus transform Kant's "transcendental" idealism into an "absolute" idealism. Kojève argues that the first rigorous attempt to do so was "*initiated* by philosophers of the rank of a Fichte and a Schelling" (Kojève, 1973, p. 123):

> In the history of Philosophy, this elimination seems to have been made for the first time by an otherwise mediocre thinker named Reinhold and it has been repeated several times by German thinkers […] But it is in the hands of Fichte and Schelling that the Kantian System began to be transformed in the direction of the Hegelian System of Knowledge (ibid., p. 137).

Whenever Kojève explicitly mentions Fichte or Schelling he does so in order to criticise their "one-sided" approaches that ultimately leaves the gap between nature and freedom intact. For

instance, in the *IRH*, Kojève follows Hegel's criticism in the *Differenzschrift* to say that Fichte offers up a "subjective" notion of the Absolute: "the relation of the subject and the object is effected within the Subject, the object being but one of the aspects of subjective activity" (Kojève, 1980, pp. 151-152). Conversely, although Schelling sought to correct this one-sided subjectivism, Kojève argues that Schelling managed to merely invert Fichte by introducing an "objective" notion of the absolute (ibid., p. 146). Thus, despite Kojève's criticism of Hegel's adoption of certain aspects of the Schellingian *Naturphilosophie*, Kojève nevertheless claims that "we had to wait for a Hegel" in order to finally have an idea of the absolute capable of filling the Kantian gap.

This elevation of Hegel above his predecessors is familiar, but what is more surprising is how Kojève describes the transition from Kant to Hegel—something that has gone largely unnoticed by commentators. Based on his analysis of the transcendental methodology, Kojève argues that the determination of the formal conditions of a complete system laid out by Kant can be "automatically transformed" into the Hegelian system. That is to say, it is possible to skip over the work of German idealism and draw a connecting line from Kant to Hegel without any intermediaries. For this reason, in *Kant*, Kojève decides not to go into great depth surrounding the details of Fichte's and Schelling's interventions. Instead, he says that "supposing it is known" he preferred to skip over the "pedagogically useless" stages of the movements that describe Fichte's and Schelling's attempts to eliminate the thing-in-itself. The reason he does so is because he thinks there is a "continuous movement that transforms the Kantian philosophy into the Hegelian System of Knowledge" (Kojève, 1973, p. 137). There is no doubt for Kojève that a gap remains in the Critical philosophy but he contends that this "singular point" is all that separates Kantian philosophy from the Hegelian system. But before getting into details of this elimination or how it "automatically" transforms the Kantian philosophy into the Hegelian system, we must take a detour through Kojève's reading of the

history of philosophy in order to better understand Hegel's innovation. Building on the work of his teacher Alexandre Koyré, Kojève famously argued in his seminars that Hegel's philosophy was able to develop into a complete system only if philosophy itself had come to an end.[139] While this "end of history" thesis is well-known in its general features, as I will show, what has been passed over in this relatively standard account of Kojève's diagnosis of the history of philosophy is the special place he reserves in it for Kant and, more specifically, the gap in the Critical philosophy.

4.3. A Kantian "ending" of history

It has often been remarked that nowhere in Hegel is there an explicit account of the end of history in the way that Kojève describes it. Yet, as I will show, our understanding of Kojève's eschatological thematic has all too often been overly simplified by commentators and has masked over some rather obvious similarities. Certainly, if we understand the Kojèvean end of history to mean something like an end of politics or even an end of the political in the Schmittian sense of the term (see chapter 3), then there is nothing of the sort to be found in Hegel. But, as I have already mentioned in the Introduction, there is more to Kojève's end of history than the arrival of a "universal and homogeneous state" in the form of a liberal democratic international order. In this sense, Derrida is certainly correct to point out that Francis Fukuyama's rendition of the end of history reflects only "a disconcerting and tardy by-product of a 'footnote': *nota bene* for a certain Kojève who deserved better" (Derrida, 1994, p.

[139] As Doha Tazi argues, "Koyré's 'Hegel à Jena 'frames the issues that preoccupied generations of French writers and, by extension, shaped critical discourse down to the present day. In his conclusion, he interprets the comprehension of time in terms of the 'end of history 'and the 'end of man, 'which forms the heart of Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*" (Tazi, 2018).

70).[140] As we will see, rather than a "last man" standing in the arena of geopolitical conflict, a figure made famous in Fukuyama's essay, Kojève's end of history thesis forces us to reflect on what it means to be "last" in the context of philosophy.

Refutations of the Kojèvean denouement are rooted in the claim that his reading of the *PhS* introduced a rift between his commentary and what Hegel "really meant". These accusations are often meted out in the context of Kojève's idiosyncratic interpretation of certain passages in the *PhS* (specifically the section on "Lordship and Bondage") that supposedly set the Hegelian renaissance in France off to a misguided start.[141] Many attempts have since been made by philosophers to distance themselves from Kojève's influence. However, it must be at least pointed out that those who expected a literal translation of Hegel's philosophy cannot accuse Kojève of duplicity. Kojève was more interested in the Hegelian spirit than he was in its letter, something that he readily acknowledged in his correspondence with Tran Duc Thao: "my work does not constitute a historical study—it mattered relatively little to me to know what Hegel himself meant in his book [….] I intended to write, not a commentary on the *Phenomenology*, but an interpretation" (Kojève, 2009, pp. 349-350). Later, in *CTD*, Kojève repeats this claim even more forcibly: "the question of knowing whether Hegel 'truly said' what I make him say would appear to me puerile if I have succeeded in demonstrating all I have said" (Kojève, 2019, p. 5). Yet, if these statements help to clarify the unwarranted claim that Kojève was simply offering a "commentary" on the *PhS* (one, moreover, prone to error), it raises another, perhaps even more important question. In what ways does Kojève's

[140] In his own engagement with the "end" in his essay "On the Apocalyptic Tone in Philosophy", Derrida engages with Kant's "End of all things" and its (albeit implicit) relation to Kojève's end of history thesis (Derrida, 1984). I explore Derrida's relation with Kojève's end of history in more detail in chapter 5.

[141] Robert Pippin, one of the popularizers of this line of thought, writes how "it is commonplace among those who admire Kojève to grumble about the 'Hegel scholars 'who just don't get it when they criticize Kojève's eccentric reading, don't see that Kojève was no mere 'professor 'and was after world historical goals not limited by textual fidelity" (Pippin, 1997, p. 260).

interpretation deviate and in which ways does it conform with what we find in Hegel? Since I will be covering this in more depth in the following chapter, I focus here only on the ways in which Kojève's interpretation stays within the letter of Hegel's thought. Although some of Kojève's more provocative statements have no correlate in Hegel, there is a certain way in which the "end of history" resonates with passages in the *PhS*. This leads us to a question that has caused a lot of confusion in Kojève studies—namely, what exactly does Kojève mean by "the end" when he refers to the end of history?

In the *IRH*, Kojève writes that "we know that for Hegel the end of history is marked by the coming of Science […] that is, by the appearance of the Wise Man or of absolute Knowledge in the World" (Kojève, 1980, p. 148). For Kojève, history is understood as a path that leads to wisdom in the form of absolute knowledge that, it needs to be emphasised, is achievable in the spatio-temporal world and not, as it is for theology, in the non-spatio-temporal beyond. History can and is completed with the Hegelian system of knowledge. To understand why the end of history is concomitant with the passage from philosophy to wisdom, it is necessary to understand what Kojève means by history and its connection with wisdom. The word "history" has various meanings. The most common way to understand this term is as an actuality in the sense of something that can be studied, i.e., historiography. The study of what is past evinces a concept of history that objectifies the movement of time, the passage from present into the past. Much different than an aggregation of past events, or even a branch of knowledge that analyses these episodes, history for Kojève is better understood in the Greek sense of ἱστορία (*historéō*), a process of inquiry and learning. For Kojève, history is the passage of consciousness through the various stages described in the *PhS*. That is to say, "the philosopher learns through the *Phenomenology* that, being a philosopher, he is a 'lover of wisdom' as it is defined in and by this book. This is to say that he learns that he wants to be a 'Wise Man' namely, a perfectly self -conscious human, fully satisfied by this coming to

consciousness" (ibid., p. 87). Consequently, "not only does the coming of wisdom complete history, but also that this coming is possible only at the end of history" (ibid., p. 95). According to Kojève, history is a process that culminates in the figure of ἵστωρ (hístōr), "the one who knows"; as such, history is, as Hegel says, spirit's laborious journey which ends in absolute knowing, a path that unfolds as the history of philosophy itself: "in the Chapter on Absolute Knowing, Hegel is no longer talking about the philosopher, but about the wise Man, about Wisdom; for the 'absolute Knowledge' (*Das absolute Wissen*) with which this Chapter is concerned is nothing other than 'wisdom' opposed to 'philo-sophy'" (ibid., p. 75). In this way, the end of history is just as much the end of philosophy; indeed, it marks the division between philosophy, the historical search for wisdom, and system, the end of this searching in the form of wisdom's actualisation.

In the first volume of his update of the Hegelian system of knowledge, *CTD*, Kojève claims that by being the first to develop a system, Hegel is also the last philosopher: "no one would seriously dispute that Hegel is the most recent of the truly great philosophers in history. On the other hand, my book has for its end to show that, being the first 'wise man' (*le Sage*) he is the last philosopher in general" (Kojève, 2019, pp. 1-2). Kojève explains that, certainly there have been, following Hegel, many other "philosophers", those that have, seemingly as a repudiation of Hegel, continued the search for wisdom even after the search had supposedly concluded. Which begs the question: what does it mean to be "last"? In his lectures on Heidegger's *BT*, Derrida offers an insightful clarification:

> Last philosophy as highest philosophy, superior philosophy, does not of course mean the last in date in the contrived succession of systems. In this regard, the *recent* is far from being always the *last*, and Hegelian philosophy is much more last than many philosophies that have followed it "in history," as they say. The Hegelian concept of "last philosophy" does not translate an empiricism of the *fait accompli* that leaves the last word to the one who speaks last. If one speaks to no purpose, or without understanding what has already happened, without following

> the philosophical conversation from its origin, one may well continue to hold forth, but one is not representing the last word or the last philosophy. The last philosophy, in the authentically Hegelian sense, is a philosophy that comprehends in itself the totality of its past and inquires after its origin or endlessly attempts to. To have the last word, one must truly speak last, and not just chatter on after the last speaker (Derrida, 2016, p. 4).

I will return to Derrida in the following chapter where I will discuss the "last" in relation to Kojève's own discourse of the end; what is important for us now is to grasp this idea of the "last" in the Hegelian sense. Like Derrida, Kojève argues that being "last" does not have any chronological significance: "for those who have wanted to 'go beyond Hegel,' they have only succeeded up to now in isolating certain aspects or fragments of Hegelianism and making them pass, wrongly, for a new 'whole'" (Kojève, 2019, p. 2). To be the "last", in the context of philosophy is, for Derrida as it is for Kojève, marked by a closure of the one "who speaks last", the point where the philosophical discourse is put to rest through its completion. As we have just seen, within the remit of the *PhS*, Hegel undergoes a transformation, a transition from someone who is philosophising, a lover of wisdom, to being in possession of a completed philosophy, a "wise man". With the announcement of absolute knowledge Hegel himself becomes the last one to speak as *Sophia* incarnate.

Kojève's reading of Kant enters at precisely the point of transition from philosophy to system, at the site of the last speaker. According to Kojève, it was Kant who first affirmed the possibility of the transition from philosophy to wisdom, as such, he claims that "the Kantian conception of philosophy differs less than one might think from the Hegelian conception of the system" (Kojève, 1973, pp. 207-208). The line dividing Kant from Hegel is the horizon that separates philosophy from system; but what exactly does this difference entail? For Kojève, if Hegel is the wise man who walks through the door marked "absolute knowledge", Kant remains a *philosopher* who lingers in the doorway, unsure whether to enter or to turn back around. If Hegel announces the end of history, Kant stands precariously at the point of its

ending—to remain a philosopher he must continue to speak. In this sense, if Kant is not himself the "last" philosopher, then he certainly problematises what it means to be last by pointing to a more general problem in the context of Kojève's work: how does one make the transition, the leap across the gap, from philosophy to wisdom? How does the philosopher escape the horizon of philosophy's *ending* in order to announce its *end*?

Again, taking our cue from his lectures on Hegel, Kojève says that the history of philosophy is the history of human discourse. In the very first lines of the opening paragraph of the preface that begins the *IRH*, Kojève lays out what is at stake in his reading of Hegel: "To understand the human by understanding his 'origin' is to understand the origin of the 'I' revealed by speech [*la parole*]" (Kojève, 1980, p. 3). The foundation of his interpretation of Hegel is established on an interrogation of the origin of speech. The origin of the human being emerges in the birth of discourse: the word "I" is the first word of history, a history that unfolds and must be grasped discursively. The human being is ensnared in discourse from the beginning; self-consciousness, i.e., absolute knowledge, is achieved through a "discursive or conceptual understanding of the totality of Being given to and created by the human being" (ibid., p. 244). However, a complete discourse not only provides a coherent account of the external world but also answers the question of how such an account is possible: "everything one says in this way can be 'deduced' in a univocal way from the 'conditions of possibility' of discursive Truth itself, discursively formulated and reduced to the minimum necessary for the de-monstration of their 'circularity' which guarantees their coherence and totality" (Kojève, 1973, p. 215). The circularity of discourse means that it is not only concerned with the description of the totality of Being but also the Being of which one speaks while speaking it. This is explained most forcefully in *CTD*: "In saying all that it can say about the Being of which it speaks, Onto-logy ought therefore to speak also of the fact that it *speaks* thereof. Therefore, it will have to speak, sooner or later, of the discourse that it itself is" (Kojève, 2019, p. 144).

Philosophical discourse, in order to be complete—that is, systematic—must close in on itself; it must be able to fully traverse itself by returning to where it began without leaving any gaps. Again, from *CTD*:

> It is precisely to the extent that it does so that it is an Onto-logy. As Ontology (or Philosophy), Onto-logy is therefore a 'circular' discourse, in the sense that it never goes beyond itself while becoming involved in itself and that, in developing, it never moves away from its point of departure to the point of no longer being able to return there (ibid.).

It was, as we have just seen, Hegel who was the first to fulfil this task: "the circularity of the Hegelian description proves that it is complete and hence correct: for an erroneous or incomplete description, which stopped at a gap or ended in an impasse, would never come back upon itself" (Kojève, 1980, p. 194). According to Kojève, the Hegelian discourse successfully describes the totality of Being by "exhausting all the possibilities of thought such that one cannot bring up any discourse in opposition to it which would not already be a part of its own discourse" (ibid.). Yet, somewhat surprisingly, in *Kant*, Kojève says that while Hegel was the last philosopher, the one who spoke last, it was not Hegel who first demonstrated the possibility of speaking last: "The affirmation that philosophy and knowledge have as their point of departure discourse (*Logos*) as such and as their goal the search for the 'conditions of its possibility' probably goes back to Plato […] but it was Kant who drew all the consequences" (Kojève, 1973, p. 216). Consequently, in order to understand the transition from philosophy to wisdom, from the ending of history to its end, we must go to his reading of Kant to interrogate what Kojève means by "speech" or "discourse" and thus to grasp the possibility of its supposed closure, of the one who *speaks* last.

In *Kant*, Kojève provides the following definition: "Sensible Intuition […] 'gives' to human understanding the object that Kant calls 'phenomenon' in such a way that 'knowledge' of such understanding is necessarily limited to phenomena […] It is uniquely such knowledge that Kant calls *discursive*" (ibid., p, 12). Kojève thus aligns the discursive explicitly with the

understanding (*Verstand*) which is given its object from sensible intuition. That is to say, discursive understanding is dependent upon sensible intuition since, being human, we do not possess an intuitive understanding (i.e., intellectual intuition), an immediate relation of thought and its object. This difference between human discursive understanding and intuitive understanding is explained in the following manner:

> Discourse is, for Kant, a specifically *human* phenomenon, that only exists for the human as *spatio-temporal* Phenomenon and that consists in the (coherent) "discursive" development of the categories in the frame of the spatio-temporal intuition "giving" to the human the phenomena from which human discourse takes all its meaning. However, when it comes to *non-sensible* Intuition, it "gives" to a *non-human* understanding the object that Kant calls "noumena", in such a way that "knowledge" of *this* understanding is *limited* to *transcendent* noumena in respect to every spatio-temporality. *This* understanding is not *discursive* in the sense that it does not have "categories" susceptible of being (spatio-temporally) "developed" in a *spatio-temporal* frame (ibid.).

Kojève delineates between two realms of knowledge, discursive and non-discursive. Whereas discursive knowledge pertains to objects of possible experience (i.e., spatio-temporal phenomena), conversely, non-discursive knowledge pertains to noumena that are beyond the realm of possible experience (i.e., non-spatio-temporal things-in-themselves). Thus, according to Kojève, the division between phenomena and noumena is a division between discourse and silence: "the noumena is essentially *ineffable* from the human point of view" (ibid., p. 13). That is not to say that noumena cannot be spoken about at all. It is not the fact of speaking *per se* that is at issue and, as Kojève insists, "there is not any contradiction in the fact that Kant *speaks* of silence and *says* that there is the ineffable" (ibid.). What is at stake is *discursive knowledge*. Standing outside of the bounds of human knowledge, noumena cannot be captured by discursive understanding in the Kantian sense of the term. It is in this sense that we must understand Kojève's claim that the presence of the non-spatio-temporal thing-in-itself in the

Critical philosophy affirms something rigorously indemonstrable: "it is an impenetrable mystery, because one cannot *speak* of what is beyond spatio-temporality" (ibid., p. 108). That is to say, we can refer to noumena, we can think about them, imagine what they might be, we just cannot say that we have knowledge of what they are: noumena present a negative horizon to discourse.

We are now entering into territory that we have previously traversed. Kojève claims that the presence of the noumena saddles Kant with a similar problem as is found in negative theology. As discussed in chapter 2, Kojève argues that even if it is possible to say that there is something ineffable (i.e., God) without contradiction, it is not possible to say what that something is. Similarly, Kojève says that although Kant dedicates to silence what is found outside of the sphere of human discourse, he nevertheless "still refers to that which is found in or on the horizon of said discourse" (ibid., p. 27). In the first *Critique*, Kant describes the tendency of reason "to go beyond its empirical employment", that is, to gather into it that which is beyond the realm of possible experience. In so doing, reason ventures "to the utmost limits of all knowledge" in order to attempt to find "rest in the completion of its circle, in a self-subsistent systematic whole" (Kant, 1998, p. 673). Reason pushes (or drives) the understanding out of its domain and into a foreign territory. This overextension leads reason toward "ideas" that do not themselves relate to any sensible object (i.e., spatio-temporal phenomenon) but is rather directed to "the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God" (ibid.). We cannot know these "objects" (soul, world, God) because they do not correspond to anything in experience. However, unlike the God of negative theology that remains trapped within the paradox of speaking about what is necessarily ineffable, Kojève argues that Kant avoids "contra-diction"—that is, speaking of what is by definition unspeakable—by introducing an innovation which displayed an "unparalleled philosophical greatness" (Kojève, 1973, p. 198). Kant embraces the fundamental ambiguity of speaking what

cannot be spoken about by introducing a pseudo-discourse: "the horizon which' closes' the discourse, or the Kantian 'system' proper, is constituted by a pseudo-discourse that 'develops' the non-spatio-temporal only in the mode of the 'as-if'" (ibid., p. 27). Again, Kojève alludes to a Kantian system with the use of inverted commas. He does so in order to point to its ambiguity. This equivocation at the site of the transition from philosophy to system is expressed not in silence, nor through discursive knowledge, but only by speaking "as-if" discourse at the site of the circle's completion were possible.

The term "as-if" was popularized in the work of neo-Kantian Hans Vaihinger in his 1911 text *Die Philosophie des Als Ob* (*The Philosophy of "As If"*). Vaihinger contends that the postulates of pure practical reason (i.e., transcendental freedom, the existence of God and our immortal souls) figure as "the highest point" in Kantian philosophy (Vaihinger, 1935, p. 327). This, in and of itself, is not contentious, for Kant himself maintains that "the concept of freedom, insofar as its reality is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason, constitutes the *keystone* of the whole structure of a system of pure reason, even of speculative reason" (Kant, 2015, p. 3). Yet, Vaihinger seems to want to push things further. He claims that his interpretation, which draws from *CPR*'s Transcendental Dialectic, underscores an idea that has gone "almost unnoticed and has been misunderstood for more than a hundred years" (Vaihinger, 1935, p. 271). What he is referring to is the "as-if" construction that is at play in the Critical philosophy. According to Vaihinger, "the As-if view plays an extraordinarily important part in Kant […] a side of Kant has hitherto been almost entirely neglected" (ibid., p. 319). In a nutshell, his thesis is that the use of the "as-if" allows Kant to present certain ideas, which would otherwise be too overwhelming (i.e., complex or irrational), through a fictionalized discourse. This interpretation does not follow Kant to the letter, however, as Vaihinger admits, "in Kant we also find in the same contexts many passages which permit or even demand a contrary interpretation" (ibid., p. 287). For instance, one would look in vain to

find in Kant the "as-if" being referred to as a type of fiction (e.g., that it is only "as-if" man is free, but really is not). While he was well aware of Vaihinger's intervention, as we can already see, Kojève takes the "as-if" in a slightly different direction.[142]

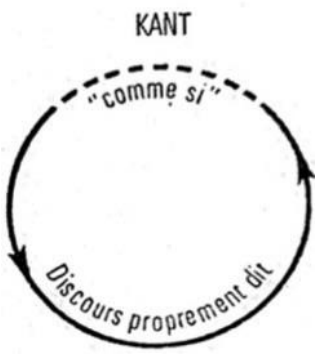
For Kojève, the "as-if" functions as a response to the gap in the Critical philosophy. Unlike Vaihinger, for whom the "as-if" is present as a fiction, Kojève claims that it infiltrates discursive thought in disguise in an attempt to dissimulate. The "as-if" recognises the gap between discursive phenomena and non-discursive noumena but, at the same time, avoids the trap of contra-diction when "speaking" of the thing-in-itself. The "as-if" is "neither discourse per se, because if it could, it would have included the As-if in itself, thus suppressing it as the 'as-if', nor as silence, because silence, not speaking at all, cannot speak in the mode of the As-if" (Kojève, 1973, pp. 16-17). Rather, the "as-if" is introduced into philosophy by Kant in order "to develop the properly discursive part of his 'system' *as-if* discourse in the mode of the 'as-if' did not appear there" (ibid.). This redoubling has the same effect as a ventriloquist, Kant uses a mouthpiece only for the sake of convincing us that he doesn't use a mouthpiece. It is only in this way that the contradiction of speaking about that which cannot be spoken is avoided.

According to Kojève, the "as-if" enters into the Kantian philosophy at a critical juncture between philosophy and system:

> The Kantian System only closes in on itself on the condition that its discourse passes through a segment of a circle drawn in dotted lines or develops discursively in the mode of the "as-if". This segment suppresses discourse, leaving it intact only by freezing it, in other words, the "as-if" suppresses the gap in the Critical philosophy (ibid., p. 17-18).

[142] Vaihinger's *The Philosophy of the "As-If"* is listed in a catalogue of Kojève's books which were drawn up and collected by the *Livres rares de la Bibliothèque nationale de France* from his apartment in Vanves (see Lussy, Florence de (ed.). *Hommage à Alexandre Kojève: Actes de la « Journée A. Kojève » du 28 janvier 2003.* Paris: Éditions de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2007).

Neither discourse per se, nor silence, the dotted line representing the pseudo-discourse of the "as-if" persists in an irresolvable internal disjunction. The consequence of Kant's "clever expedient" is that the gap in the Critical philosophy remained open "even after the additon of a third Critque" (ibid., p. 92).[143] Unlike Hegel, whose circular philosophical discourse "says everything that can be said", in the act of introducing the "as if" into philosophy, Kant both denies and sanctions the possibility of a circular discourse. The result is an aporetic movement that marks out a place of indecision. Even though Kant has in view a complete system, it never finds the rest it seeks in its completion. While reason must strive for unity, the striving for systematic closure "is never in fact completed, but develops 'without end', that is, indefinitely. In other words, the discourse that is supposed to be uni-total, in fact always contains a gap" (ibid., p. 111). Different from the Hegelian circle, Kant's philosophical "system" closes only on account of its being left open by a "dotted line". In *Kant*, Kojève illustrates this idea by providing the following diagram:[144]



The Kantian discoruse is thus presented by Kojève as one that "has a beginning, but which has no end" (ibid., p. 79). There remains a gap which means the circular discourse is not able to return to its point of departure but is forever held in abeyance.

[143] It should be pointed out that Kojève says that the camouflaging of the gap with the use of the "as-if" is a strategy that is employed just as much in the second critique as in the third, the "practical part of the Kantian 'system'" (Kojève, 1973, p. 113).

[144] A similar diagram is provided in the *IRH* to describe Kant's discourse (Kojève, 1980, pp. 105, 119).

In his book *The Discourse of the Syncope*, Jean-Luc Nancy writes that "in every place that it systematically ties itself together, Kant's discourse marks its undecidability" (Nancy, 2008, p. 6). As Nancy puts it, the "question posed by Kant (and not to Kant) is how to present philosophy and what holds up the system?—We shall answer, taking a hasty shortcut, that Kant 'responds' with 'undecidability'" (ibid.). As Nancy explains, a decision to undecide "cannot be the object of any demonstration, neither by deducing it nor by excluding it from the system; it can neither be derived nor refuted; it does not submit to the logic of a system, though neither does it oppose it" (ibid., p. 8). For his part, Kojève contends that this indecisiveness manifests itself in a change in the "mode" of discourse. The decision to undecide is inscribed into the Critical philosophy in the pseudo-discourse of the "as-if" that camouflages over the gap *as-if* it was discursive. It is a paradoxical presence of the absence of discourse that allows Kant to deliver a philosophy that lingers on the horizon of the end, a philosophy that neither submits to nor opposes the logic of the system, and thus avoids the consequences of speaking last.

4.4. At the Juncture of the End

Kojève argues that the "essential difference" between Hegel and Kant—the difference between the one who speaks last and the one who keeps on speaking in order to prolong the ending of history—"exists only insofar as the so-called Kantian 'system' contains irreducible gaps that are camouflaged but not filled by the discursive development of the 'infinite task' […] In other words, the Kantian ' system' differs from the Hegelian system only insofar as it is not 'circular'" (Kojève, 1973, p. 209). In *CTD*, Kojève tells us that Hegel fully demonstrates this "*complete* (that is 'circular') discursive development"—a beginning that *coincides* with its end (Kojève, 2019, p. 197). What differentiates Kant's pseudo-system from the Hegelian system is a philosophical discourse that, in Hegel's words, takes the form of "a circle in which the first becomes also the last, and the last also the first" (Hegel, 2010b, p. 49). In a remarkable passage

in the *IRH*, Kojève argues that the "idea of circularity is, if you will, the *only* original element introduced by Hegel" (Kojève, 1980, p. 93). Hegel's originality, his philosophical innovation, was to produce a discourse that was able to account for its own condition of possibility by speaking not only of that of which it speaks but also of the very fact that it speaks of it.[145] The radical closure that Kojève argues is produced out of Hegel's discourse forces us to ask what precisely does it mean for a philosophy to be capable of completion. What are the consequences for a philosophy that announces its own end? What does it mean to "overcome" philosophy in the Kojèvean sense of the term?

In attempting to answer this question, Kojève offers us the most radical aspect of his reading of Kant. He contends that what separates Kant from Hegel is not, as many have argued, that Hegel completed the Kantian philosophy, but rather that Kant, paradoxically, chose to leave the decision between philosophy and system undecided. Faced with the possibility of forming a circular philosophical discourse, Kant consciously recoiled: "we know, thanks to Hegel, that the Kantian discourse can *clearly* be developed in a way that makes it total, i.e., circular" and yet Kant "did not even *attempt* (as did Reinhold, Fichte, and Schelling during his lifetime) to close it" (Kojève, 1973, p. 24). Kant blocks the completion of the system by enacting a deliberation at the site of the circle's closure. This suspension, according to Kojève, marks the place of a rupture between philosophy and system: "Kant is able to continue to philosophise only so as long as he does not end at the [Hegelian] system" (Kojève, 2019, p. 32). A "system" that contains a gap is not a system at all; it is instead the hope of a system that is indefinitely delayed, constantly grasping for its end through a discourse that seeks closure only by remaining open. In other words, Kant was able "to avoid the alternative of either

[145] As Daniel Selcer argues, "Kojève claims that Hegel's demand is a simple one: language that claims some type of correspondence with the real is nevertheless itself something real. Any philosophical discourse, then, that claims to speak of being must speak of the being of language in the course of its own exposition" (Selcer, 2000, p. 185).

asserting or denying wisdom by supposing an infinite or indefinite philosophical progress" (Kojève, 1980, p. 92). Why does Kant feel the need to resort to a pseudo-discourse that merely presents itself "as-if" it were closed or circular, instead of actually closing it? What lays behind this paradoxical decision to undecide?

Here Kojève provides us with some alternatives. One possible reason is linked to the fact that in some instances Kant seems to suggest that the non-spatio-temporal noumenon is an unavoidable element of the Critical philosophy that cannot be expunged. The reason being that the very concept of spatio-temporal phenomenon necessarily presupposes its opposite. Although Kojève admits that this dependence has some textual support in the first edition of the *CPR,* e.g., A251 (Kant, 1998, p. 348), he dismisses it as a possible explanation. Although "it is undeniable that something can only 'reveal' or 'appear' if this something can also subsist independently of its 'appearance' or without being 'revealed', it does not follow that this something must be transcendent in relation to spatio-temporality, i.e., a thing-in-itself in the Kantian sense" (Kojève, 1973, p. 23). Another option that Kojève puts forward is that the thing-in-itself must be introduced in view of the "complete utilization" (*vollstandiger Gebrauch*) of reason. That is to say, that "discourse can only be total if it implies the 'notion' of the thing-in-itself" (ibid., p. 24). But, again, this explanation is rejected. This time Kojève uses the counter-example of Hegel to argue that a complete (i.e., circular) discourse can be developed without the introduction of the thing-in-itself. Kojève says that even though Kant (obviously!) could not have known about the Hegelian attempt to eliminate the thing-in-itself, he was still able to witness the attempt by Reinhold which he "formally opposed" (ibid., p. 11). Futhermore, Kojève contends that the attempt to "close" his discourse in the mode of the "as-if" is evidence that Kant knew that he *could have* moved from (open) philosophy to (closed) system: "the moment that [Kant] realized that the closure of his discourse by the discursive development of the notion of the thing-in-itself could only be done in the mode of the 'as-if'," he knew it was

necessarily "unsatisfactory" (ibid., p. 24). In other words, Kant tips his hand when he attempts to close his philosophy with the pseudo-discourse of the "as-if". In choosing this path he implicitly reveals that the inclusion of the thing-in-itself does not lead to a complete system. This leaves us with the third explanation. Kojève claims that the reason that Kant decided to introduce the thing-in-itself was in order to orient his discourse towards the highest ends (*höchsten Zwecke*). He once again points us to the Transcendental Doctrine of Method in the section where Kant develops the idea of the supreme end (*letzten Zweckes*). Kojève claims that this particular section is "vital to the understanding of Kantianism" as it shows that "the notion of the thing-in-itself is present in the Kantian 'system' so that it can *speak*, if only in the mode of the 'as-if,' of what is, for Kant, the 'supreme end' of the human" (ibid., p. 28). For Kojève, Kant's choice to develop his notion of free action in the pseudo-discourse of the "as-if" connects Kant's decision to undecide with the anthropological question at the heart of Critical philosophy, the question of what is *human* in man.

In the *Jäsche Logic* first published in 1800, Kant reflects on the four basic questions which orient his entire philosophy: *What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope? What is man?* The first three questions each correspond to one of the three *Critiques* and respond to a distinctive domain. Metaphysics answers the first question, morals the second, and religion the third. Yet Kant tells us that it is the final question, the anthropological question *par excellence,* that ties them altogether by providing "a systematic connection of these cognitions, or a combination of them in the idea of a whole" (Kant, 1992, p. 537). That is to say, the key to transforming the Critical *philosophy* into a *system* depends upon the question, "*Was ist der Mensch?*", since only an answer to this question is able to deliver "inner satisfaction" by "closing, as it were, the scientific circle" (ibid., p. 539). But, as we have seen, because the circle does not close, this is a question that for Kant does not have a definitive answer. If, for Kojève, the problem that animates his reading of Hegel is to understand the

origin of the "I" revealed by speech, then for Kant this question remains unresolved.[146] For Kant, the satisfaction of a complete system stands just out of reach.

The connection between anthropology and system will be the focus of the next chapter; however, it is important to flesh out the relevance it has in the context of Kojève's reading of Kant. Kojève argues that the employment of the "as-if", a pseudo-discourse that suspends philosophy at the site of its closure, is "the authentic philosophical expression of judeo-christian anthropology" (Kojève, 1973, p. 9). The Judeo-Christian conception of man introduces a historical dimension to the human being in the form of a striving for conformity with the image of God. Unlike the Greek conception, the Christian conception of the human is one that can and, indeed, must change with a view towards its redemption. However, not only does this pursuit not bring worldly satisfaction, it entails its absolute impossibility: "at the basis of [Kantian] philosophy is an essentially and authentically religious attitude, which translates […] as the deep conviction that human and the world in which he lives can in no way procure the satisfaction which includes a happiness of which one is worthy" (ibid., p. 39). When Kojève uses the word "religious" to describe Kant, he does not have in mind any kind of dogmatic faith in God or scripture. What is at stake is not, strictly speaking, theological; of course, Kant argued morality does not require the type of foundation that is found in established religions, e.g., the Christian principle of divine revelation. And, as Kojève points out, Kant was "resolutely hostile and absolutely free from any religious or other 'hysterical' enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*)" (ibid., p. 42). Rather, when Kojève says that Kant accepts a Judeo-Christian concept of the human being, he refers to Kant's formulation of "rational faith" (*Vernunftglaube*) which says that human practical reason relies on a *hope* that, in striving to fulfil their obligation to the moral law, human beings will one day achieve complete satisfaction in the non-spatio-temporal

[146] In the *Opus postumum*, Kant admits "*cogitans sum, meipsum nondum cognosco* [I am thinking, but I do not know myself yet]" (OP 22:95).

beyond. Kant's religious conviction, according to Kojève, manifests in the pseudo-discourse of the "as-if"—it is a discourse that affirms the possibility of satisfaction while implicitly denying it. Clinging to a religious, Judeo-Christian concept of the human being, "[Kant] was only able to find the *subjective* certainty of hope, i.e., faith, hence the necessity, according to the philosophical plan, to develop discursively the 'content' of the certainty involved only in the mode of 'as-if'" (ibid., p. 96). While seeking certainty, the disposition of the "as-if"—the discourse that attempts to bridge the gap between philosophy and system—finds expression only in the ambiguity of hope.

I began this chapter by discussing the tantalising pain Kant experienced when faced with the fact that his philosophy contained a gap, the result of which left his system incomplete. We are now in a position to investigate this pain at its source, at least from the perspective of Kojève's reading. Greek mythology tells of the spectacular misbehaviour that the demigod, Tantalus, displayed after being invited to a dinner with the gods. His indiscretions were punished by his father, Zeus; and, as fitting of a divine discipline, Tantalus was made to endure eternal suffering. Forced to stand in a pool of water under the branches of a fruit tree, what made the experience unbearable was that any attempt to satisfy his thirst or hunger was in vain. Whenever he tried to reach for a piece of fruit, the branches would recoil; whenever he tried to take a sip of water, the pond would recede. In the essay, "The End of All Things", Kant says that to continue to philosophise is to strive toward wisdom while rejecting its possibility. He claims that while the human being may hope to attain wisdom, "he may never let the self-indulgent persuasion befall him—still less may he proceed according to it—that he has grasped it" (Kant, 2001, p. 228). Like Tantalus, Kant reaches for something ungraspable—a complete philosophical system—while implying, with aid of the pseudo-discursive "as-if", that it could, at least *in principle*, be grasped. And yet the "inner satisfaction" of a closed circle remains forever elusive.

This tension between philosophy and system can be captured by the German word "*Verwindung*" which indicates a kind of overcoming that entails something different from the idea of dialectical sublimation (*Aufhebung*) or of a "going beyond" (*Überwindung*). Nietzsche was the first philosopher to use this term in the context of getting over an historical illness. In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche poses the problem of overcoming the decadence associated with the beginning of the end of modernity, in a manner that neither accepts nor seeks to surpass it. Similalry, Heidegger refers to a process of recovering from a trauma: "This getting-over (*Verwindung*) is similar to what happens when, in the human realm, one gets over grief or pain" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 39).[147] Yet, the "getting over" that Heidegger is referring to is not a cure or an alleviation of the pain; it is instead a kind of overcoming that neither accepts nor negates the trauma. We can perhaps understand the pain that accompanies this "getting-over" from the perspective of the lone thinker that, at least according to Kojève, is said to have made the leap from philosophy to wisdom. In correspondence with Karl Windischmann in 1810, Hegel reflects on the struggle he endured before completing his *PhS.* In his letter, Hegel writes that during this period he had "suffered a few years of hypochondria, to the point of enervation", an illness he describes as a "labyrinth of the mind, that only Science is capable of leading you out of and healing you" (Hegel, 1978, pp. 328-329).

At the end of the seminar discussing the final chapter of the *PhS*, Kojève comments on this exchange, arguing that the struggle to reach absolute knowledge is experienced as a very real sickness: "[Hegel] says, in one of his letters, that [absolute] knowledge cost him dearly. He speaks of a period of total depression that he lived through between the twenty-fifth and thirtieth years of his life: a 'Hypochondria' that was so severe as 'to paralyze all his powers' (*bis zur Erlähmung aller Kräfte*)" (Kojève, 1980, p. 167). For Kojève, the key is to understand

[147] As Gianni Vattimo explains, "*Verwindung* defines a characteristically Heideggerian position, his idea of what the task of thought ought to be in this moment in which we find ourselves situated, namely at the end of philosophy" (Vattimo, 1987, p. 13).

how Hegel was able to conquer this hypochondria, an illness that was brought on, moreover, from his profound grasp of the finitude of philosophy itself. The goal of bringing philosophy to its end, to be its last speaker, is the very source of his torment: "But, finally, he surmounted this 'Hypochondria' by becoming a wise man […] definitively reconciling himself with all that is and has been, by declaring that there will never more be anything new on earth" (ibid., p. 168). Conversely, residing precariously on the precipice of the end, on and in the horizon that separates philosophy from system, Kant remained unable to surmount his own pain:

> the state in which he now is will always remain an ill compared with a better one which he always stands ready to enter; and the representation of an infinite progression toward the final end is nevertheless at the same time a prospect on an infinite series of ills which, even though they may be outweighed by a greater good, do not allow for the possibility of contentment; for he can think that only by supposing that the *final end* will at some time be *attained* (Kant, 2001, pp. 227-228).

There is an illness that is felt in the gap of the Critical philosophy. It is a gap that Kant himself both inhabits and labours within owing to his rejection of the ultimate end, wisdom, in favour of an illness that does not permit satisfaction. However, the completion of the Critical philosophy is a mirage. That is to say, while the philosopher must hope to attain a complete and unified system, it is a striving that can never become actual for Kant—satisfaction must always be deferred.

Kant's decision to remain a philosopher while struggling to complete his system places him on the horizon of the end of history without crossing over to the other side. Held in an undetermined or undecided state between completion and incompletion, the Critical philosophy sustains itself in a self-inflicted *transcendental* pain—built upon an abyssal gap, this pain is truly like that of Tantalus. Perhaps if Hegel would have had the opportunity to speak with Kant, he would have used Kant's own reference (found in the second *Critique*) from Horace's *Satires* against him: *Quid statis? Nolint. Atqui licet esse beatis* ("Why are you

standing still? They are not willing; yet they could be happy").[148] Yet, as Kojève strives to explain, Kant's unhappiness and pain are not the result of a deficiency. Kant chooses this fate and, in doing, exposes the juncture which divides philosophy from wisdom. So long as Kant stuck with the Critical philosophy, denying wisdom, he was condemned to the fate of Tantalus. The Critical philosophy stares through the signage dotting the road leading to the Hegelian system and decides to undecide, to take a turn, to twist away (*verwinden*) in some other direction and warns against the folly of trying to grasp the ungraspable.

The gap which divides the theoretical from the practical holds the critical edifice in tension, to remove it is to erase the very condition of possibility for its emergence. Although unification of the theoretical and practical was always Kant's dream and most intimate desire, to wed his offspring would mean that he would be compelled to admit that it was possible to "live" in full satisfaction—that is, without pain—which would result in a total annihilation of the kernel of the Critical philosophy itself. Thus, it could be surmised that the incompleteness of Critical philosophy is not responsible for Kant's pain, but that *it is precisely the opposite*: the decision to be in pain is responsible for the incompleteness of his philosophy.[149] As Kant himself portends, "it is not without cause that human beings feel their existence a burden, even if they themselves are the cause" (Kant, 2001, p. 225).[150] It is only with Hegel that this pain is

[148] *Satires*, I, i, 19. In the preface to the second *Critique* Kant makes reference to these lines. They refer to the reluctance of the people when faced with the opportunity to change positions with each other in order that they may improve their lot. For his part, Kant uses them against the philosophers and theologians who claim to be able to prove the existence of God.

[149] As Fichte says about Kant, "To know that one is deceived and yet to remain deceived: This is not a state of conviction and harmony with oneself; instead, it is a state of serious inner conflict" (Fichte, 1994, p. 98).

[150]Anticipating thinkers like Lacan and Žižek, Kojève thinks that this pain is linked to a kind of surplus (even *jouissance*) in Kant. It is not that Kant simply rejects satisfaction in the world, but that this state of dissatisfaction is unsatisfactory for Kant. This decision by Kant to undecide his philosophy can be understood through an example given by Alenka Zupančič in her book *Ethics of the Real*. Zupančič argues that Kant's ethics cannot be based on the renunciation of pleasure. Rather there is a deeper paradox at work. Using Marcel Proust's *Swann in Love*, in which the hero is desperately in love with a non-reciprocating Odette, Zupancic explains: "In his terrible suffering he at first believes that what he really wants is to cease to be in love with her, so as to escape from his suffering. But then, upon more careful analysis of his feelings, he realizes that this is not so. Instead, he wants his suffering to end while he himself remains in love, because his experience of the pleasure of love depends on this latter

overcome. Yet, despite this victory, are we not able to ask of Kojève's Hegel the same questions that have been posed to Kant? If the system marks an end to discourse then how exactly did Kojève think he could articulate this end? Is the transition from philosophy to wisdom enunciated from within philosophical discourse or outside of it? More generally, we are still left asking what comes of a discourse that *decides its own end*? Is the mark of denouement itself a discursive function? These questions lie at the heart of Kojève's attempt at an update of the Hegelian *Système du Savoir*. In the final chapter of the thesis, I will revisit Kojève's end of history thesis. But instead of either accepting or rejecting it, I will show that the same aporias that accompany Kant's thwarted attempt at completion linger in Kojève's reading of Hegel, an aporia that points to a gap in Kojève's own thought.

condition" (Zupančič, 2000, p. 8). Kojève argues that Kant's use of the "as-if" discourse is symptomatic of this same suffering. Kant wants his philosophy to become a system (and, hence, end) while he himself remains a philosopher.

Chapter 5: Speaking Last? Silence at the End of History

5.1. Introduction: The Hegelian *brouillons*

In the first four chapters of this thesis, I have shown that while ostensibly attempting to present a complete philosophical system, what Kojève actually highlights are the difficulties one faces when trying to draw this circle to a close. Each of these chapters served as an example of the same problem that repeatedly arises in Kojève's corpus—namely, the problem of completion. Moreover, I have demonstrated that the issue of completion is not only expressed in the content of the texts we have been discussing but also in their form. Like almost all of Kojève's manuscripts, the texts that I have homed in on are incomplete drafts that were left unpublished in his lifetime. Prima facie, Kojève's work on Hegel does not seem to fall into the same category as the rest of his works. The *IRH* was published by Gallimard in 1947 and is, in fact, one of only two book-length manuscripts that Kojève published in his lifetime. Yet, that only tells a part of the story. In fact, with the exception of the preface and footnotes, the content of the *IRH* is formed from notes taken by a student, Raymond Queneau, who curated the volume. As I make note of in the Introduction, Kojève was thoroughly displeased with the result. In correspondence with Tran Duc Thao, Kojève wrote how he was "especially sensitive" to the fact of having had his seminars on Hegel published in "a chaotic state," a decision which he said caused him "remorse" (Kojève, 2009, p. 349). In the previous chapter I explained that a similar aversion towards publication can also be found in his post-war "update" of Hegel. Despite the lofty ambition of retelling the history of Western philosophy through the lens of Hegel's complete system, Kojève was well aware that his presentation of this "project" ("*Entwurf*", as Kojève will call it, using the German) was far from perfect, even going as far as to apologise to the reader for its state of incompletion. Thus, notwithstanding the reception

of these texts, there is no question that, just like the rest of his corpus, Kojève's writings on Hegel fall into the category of philosophical *brouillons*.

Moreover, not only is his work on Hegel consistent with the incomplete character of his œuvre in general, but I argue that these specific *brouillons* represent the insightful example of the problem we face when reading Kojève. Nowhere else in Kojève's writing is the tension between content and form more acute than in these drafts. In both the *IRH* and *CTD* (the text which serves as the first of a long line of "introductions" to his "update" of Hegel), Kojève claims to be presenting a complete and closed philosophy in the form of a system—namely, a Hegelian *Système du Savoir* which is presented as an "end" in the sense of both a terminal point and the goal of an historical evolution. As we saw in the previous chapter, Kojève says that the completion of this evolution is revealed and realised in and by a circular philosophical discourse. In the *IRH*, Kojève explains how, in the *PhS*, what is presented is "the definitive stopping of history. And, curiously enough, this criterion is precisely the circularity of his description—that is, of the 'system of science'" (Kojève, 1980, p. 193). Similarly, in *CTD*, Kojève says that Hegel attempts to extend this phenomenological analysis to an ontology, presented in the *Science of Logic* as "a 'circular' discourse, in the sense that it never goes beyond itself while becoming involved in itself and that, in developing, it never moves away from its point of departure to the point of no longer being able to return there" (Kojève, 2019, p. 144). The circularity of Hegel's philosophy is what leads Kojève to claim that it represents a philosophical, political, and historical *terminus ad quem* (referred to as the "end of history"). Most studies of Kojève mobilise this thesis as their point of departure; however, what is less emphasised, if mentioned at all, are the moments when Kojève gives a nod to the tension found in an incomplete work that itself proclaims completion. It is at these specific moments that he stumbles and even raises doubt regarding the completion of the Hegelian system.

One such example is found in a footnote appended to the *IRH* in the chapter on "Philosophy and Wisdom," where Kojève questions whether Hegel was, in fact, successful in the endeavour to produce a complete and closed system:

> it is not sufficient that the *Phenomenology* be circular, the *Logic* (or the *Encyclopaedia*) must be so, too; and, what is much more important, the system in its *entirety* [that is to say, the entirety of the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*] must also be circular. Now, it is precisely here that the non-circularity of Hegel's system is perfectly obvious. But here I can say so only in passing and without proof (Kojève, 1980, p. 98).

What are we to make of this ambiguous admission of incompletion? If the non-circularity of the Hegelian system is, as Kojève says, "perfectly obvious" then is the very ground that the end of history thesis stands on not ripped out from under it? Even more troubling, what Kojève leaves us with is only a declaration of incompletion that cannot be elaborated upon. Why does Kojève refuse to elaborate on what would seem to be a crack in the core of his philosophical edifice? With that said, it is not only Kojève who is without words at this crucial moment but so are his commentators who have largely ignored this startling declaration. Perhaps this omission could be forgiven if it were an outlier, unique of its kind. But this is not the case. Although he does not admit one way or the other as to whether his project of "updating" Hegel was indeed successful in its attempt to articulate a complete *Systéme du Savoir*, he does leave the question open: "My undertaking having a discursive character, its accomplishment [*réussite*] can consist only in its success, [and it is] the reader alone who is empowered to judge" (Kojève, 2019, p. 6). Despite Kojève's request to his readers, this judgment has yet to be made. As I will show, by attempting to judge whether or not he was successful in his attempt to expose a complete and exhaustive Hegelian system, what we are led toward instead is a fundamental challenge to the way we usually read and understand Kojève's end of history thesis.

Most accounts of Kojève's philosophy follow a predictable trajectory. The reader is first introduced to his lectures on Hegel while being guided towards a specific footnote found in the *IRH* which details aspects of the end of history. Those who are familiar with this road will also know that it is paved by the historical struggle for recognition between master and slave—Kojève's reading of the "Lordship and Bondage" (*Herrschaft und Knechtschaft*) section of Hegel's *PhS.*[151] Up to this point in the thesis, I have neither completely ignored nor exclusively lingered on the most identifiable aspect of Kojève's thought. The reader is forgiven for thinking that this evasion is somewhat conspicuous, perhaps even suspicious. However, my motive for waiting this long to interrogate what many consider to be the heart and soul of Kojève's philosophy is related to one of the central claims of the thesis. While I do not claim to offer an exhaustive survey of Kojève's corpus, I have tried to show that those texts lying outside the ambit of Hegel are all marked by a certain indecision, suspension, and incompletion. In this chapter I will conclude the thesis by arguing that these same tendencies—*indecision*, *suspension*, and *incompletion*—apply just as much to his "attempt at an update" (*essai d'une mise à jour*) of the *Système du Savoir hégélien* and, by extension, to the end of history thesis, just as they do to the rest of his corpus. This will require that I finally come around to traversing Kojève's reading of Hegel. While this has been done many times before my aim here is to offer a slightly altered perspective, a kind of tilt on the usual claims that animate his "project", his *Entwurf*, his *brouillon hégélien*.

As I mentioned back at the beginning of the first chapter, there is a certain difficulty in coming to terms with Kojève's idiosyncratic analysis of Hegel. By now, it is generally accepted

[151] For a commentary on Kojève's application of the master/slave dialectic to his reading of Hegel, see, (Riley, 1981). Riley produces a useful analysis of Kojève's master/slave dialectic in its relation to Hegel and Marx. He rejects Alan Bloom's claim that Kojève was a Marxist, but in doing so, he confuses Bloom's position for Kojève's and consequently ends up accusing Kojève of not producing a faithful reading of Marx or Hegel. For a critical account of Kojève's end of history thesis in relation to Hegel's own conception, see, (Dale, 2014). As to the connection with Marx, this aspect of Kojève thought falls outside of the scope this thesis.

that his interpretation of Hegel is not to be understood as a "commentary" in the proper sense of the term. As Kojève himself readily acknowledged, he willingly disregarded the letter in order to extract what he sees to be the spirit of Hegelian texts.[152] But the question still remains as to where, precisely, the "originality" of Kojève's interpretation lies. Part of the difficulty in locating the specific innovation in Kojève's reading of Hegel is due to the way that he knits Heidegger into this analysis. Commentators have embraced different tactics when dealing with this cross-pollination. While some have chosen to ignore it altogether,[153] most have attempted some kind of a resolution that involves a "synthesis" of Hegel's historical dialectic and Heidegger's existential-ontological analytic of *Dasein*.[154] However, this latter approach is not without its difficulties. In fact, by unpacking Kojève's hybridisation of Hegel and Heidegger, what we find is not a synthesis or resolution but rather a *tension*, a weaving which ends in a knot. My goal in what follows is to highlight this entanglement while drawing out its consequences as it relates to the problem of completion. More specifically, I will demonstrate how the end of history is problematically located at the node where his reading of Hegel and Heidegger collide. Moving against the grain of what has become a standard reception of

[152] In a remarkable letter, Kojève felt compelled to remind one of his early critics, Tran Duc Thao, that his reading of Hegel was "intended as an *interpretation* and not a commentary" (Kojève, 2009, p. 349). In a review of the *IRH*, Aimé Patri wrote that "under the pseudonym of Hegel, the author [Kojève] exposed a personal way of thinking"—on his copy of the review, Kojève wrote a side note: "*Bien vu*" (Patri, 1961). Similarly, Pirotte says that although Kojève "was both a reader of Hegel and Heidegger, in truth he was neither Hegelian nor Heideggerian" (Pirotte, 2005, p. 25).

[153] E.g., (Riley, 1981).

[154] Pirotte offers the most detailed analysis of this "synthesis", arguing that "Kojève's originality, distinguished by this from the path later followed by Sartre, is, however, to forge a finite system that, without yielding anything of its radicality, offers both an unprecedented solution to the problem of a *dualistic* onto-phenomenology, and a coherent alternative to the Hegelian monism of 'reconciliation'. This is the whole paradoxical issue, which in many respects remains misunderstood or unsuspected, of the theory of the *End of History*. This Kojèvean 'end' of History, 'playing' Heidegger against Hegel and Hegel against Heidegger, synthesizing the historical dialectic of one and the temporal analysis of the *Dasein* of the other" (Pirotte, 2005, p. 216). While agreeing that there are many aspects of the end of history that have been "misunderstood", as we will see, I argue, against Pirotte, that Kojève fails to deliver a complete and closed system.

Kojève, I argue that rather than the point which crowns the completion of the system, Kojève's end of history remains suspended at the site of its supposed closure.

5.2. A Basic Error: Kojève's refutation of Hegelian monism

In the final page of the *IRH*, Kojève appends a footnote which says that Hegelian philosophy "would probably never have been understood if Heidegger had not published his book" (Kojève, 1980, p. 259). Almost 20 years later, this claim is repeated in the preface to *CTD*, where he explains that his "update" of Hegel could not have been written if he had "not read Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*" (Kojève, 2019, p. 4). There are other examples where Kojève says similar things, but in each of these cases no further explanation is given. It is therefore unsurprising that commentators have struggled to elaborate on this connection while, at the same time, insisting that Heidegger is the lynchpin that holds together Kojève's idiosyncratic reading of Hegel. One of the problems commentators face is that besides these oblique allusions, actual references to Heidegger or his work are few and far between in Kojève. For example, the reference from *CTD* I just cited is the lone mention of Heidegger in that work. And, even though the *IRH* is the book most commentators refer to when discussing Kojève's connection to Heidegger, the text (spanning just under 600 pages) contains less than a dozen citations. In fact, Kojève's most significant engagement with the connection between Hegel and Heidegger is not found in either one of his major texts on Hegel but in a short book review.

In 1936, Kojève wrote a rather severe review of Alfred Delp's book, *Tragische Existenz. Zur Philosophie Martin Heidegger*, where he accuses the author of simplifying both Heidegger and Hegel in an attempt to draw a bridge between them.[155] However, this article is

[155] This particular review was posthumously published under the title *Note inédite sur Hegel et Heidegger* (B. Hesbois, "Rue Descartes", n.7, 1993, pp. 29-46). In what follows I will refer to this document with the abbreviation *NHH*. It should also be noted that Kojève wrote a second, untitled review of Delp's book that was published in Koyré's journal *Recherches philosophiques* in 1936.

more interesting for Kojève's own thoughts concerning the relation between Hegel and Heidegger than it is for his criticism of Delp. One of Kojève's main points is to stress that there is indeed a connection between Hegel and Heidegger, but it is one that requires a more careful weighing of their respective philosophies. Importantly, he insists that it is not only Heidegger who is indispensable for an understanding of Hegel, but the converse is also true: "only by comparing him to Hegel, can we see what in Heidegger is philosophical and philosophically new" (Kojève, 2020, p. 211).[156] If there is a locus that binds Hegel and Heidegger together—as Kojève repeatedly says is the case—then it is one that requires an interpretation that plays Heidegger against Hegel just as much as the other way around. Through a reading of his review, combined with the relevant texts on Hegel, I will now attempt to unpack this relationship and show how it is constitutive of Kojève's own thinking that propels him toward his concept of the end of history. But before we can begin to unravel *how* Kojève incorporates Heidegger into his reading of Hegel, we must first understand *why* he feels the need to do so. This need, as I will now show, develops from what Kojève calls a "basic error" in Hegel's ontology.

In a section of the *IRH* entitled "Interpretation of the third part of Chapter VIII of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Conclusion)," Kojève confronts the problem of transitioning between Hegel's *Science Logic* and the *PhS*. As I alluded to in the previous section, there is an assumption in Kojève's reading of Hegel that, in order to be systematic, the *PhS* and the *Logic* must somehow connect up with each other to form a circle. Taking as his cue Hegel's claims that "the whole of science is in itself a circle" (Hegel, 2010b, p. 49), Kojève argues that not only must the *PhS* and *Logic*, respectively, be circular, but these two constitutive parts of the system must themselves form a circle:

[156] In his otherwise generous appraisal of Kojève's work on Hegel, Father Gaston Fessard notes the "fundamental absurdities M. Kojève is led to by his intrepid logic," making special mention of how Kojève transforms Hegel into a "Heideggerian before the fact" (Fessard, 1992, p. 197).

> In the passage where Hegel spoke of the circularity of the 'system,' it was said that in coming to the end of the *Logik*, one is brought around to its beginning, and that having effected this circular movement, one sees the necessity of going beyond it—that is, of going to the *Phenomenology*" (Kojève, 1980, p. 150).

However, Kojève thinks that it is at the level of "the whole" that this circularity breaks down. As mentioned, Kojève says that it is "perfectly obvious" that Hegel fails to draw the circle between the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*—although, as we have seen, he says "this only in passing and without proof" (ibid., p. 98). It is a curious declaration that in some ways is reminiscent of Pierre de Fermat's mysterious marginal note that he added to his copy of *Arithmetica* (a third-century mathematic text by Diophantus) where he proclaimed to have a "a truly marvelous demonstration" of a particularly difficult mathematical proposition which, unfortunately, the margin of the text was "too narrow" to contain.[157] However, unlike Fermat's infamous "Last Theorem", where no indication of a solution is provided, elsewhere in the *IRH*, Kojève does elaborate on the nature of Hegel's supposed failure. While Kojève does not, as he says, provide a proof of the non-circularity of Hegel's system, he does point toward the presence of a wrench in the works.

Immediately following the declaration of its necessity, Kojève claims that in order to enact a transition between these two parts of the system—that is "to proceed from the *Logik* to the *Phenomenology*"—what is required is an understanding of how circularity functions in both cases. Firstly, in the *Phenomenology*, Kojève says that Hegel operates under the assumption that there is an *Unterschied*, a difference or distinction, between Consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) and Self-Consciousness (*Selbstbewusstsein*) which, in turn, presupposes "a real distinction between the human and the world" (Kojève, 1980, p. 150). This difference, according to Kojève, places Hegel's philosophy within the ambit of philosophers that from Descartes to

[157] For more on this incredible episode in the history of mathematics, see (Singh, 1997).

Husserl have tried to mark the difference between subjectivity and objectivity, a difference that describes the relation between thought and reality whereby "the object appears only to the extent that it is related to the subject" (ibid., p. 151). However, different from Reinhold or Fichte, where this relation is posited within the subject as a *subjective* subject-object, Kojève says that in Hegel (who, in turn, borrows in part from Schelling) the object must be given its full freedom (*seine völlige Freiheit*) which means that the relation presupposes "an object external to and independent of the subject" (ibid., p. 152). At the same time, Kojève insists that when dealing with Hegel this dualism cannot be understood in the "classical"—that is to say, Cartesian—sense which attempts to "deduce" the object (i.e., "reality" or *Bewusstsein*) from the subject (i.e., "thought" or *Selbstbewusstsein*) or vice versa. According to Kojève, Hegel is able to avoid these one-sided suppositions through a positing of an *a priori* synthesis of the real and ideal: "[Hegel] posits—that is, he presupposes—both of them. And he 'deduces' them only after the fact, from the Spirit which is their common result" (ibid., p. 153). Beginning with the assumption of absolute knowledge—that is, the coincidence of subject and object—Hegel traces out the path of spirit's becoming where a difference between the two is maintained.

Secondly, Kojève claims that if there is to be a *transition* from the *Phenomenology* to the *Logic* (or vice versa) their structures must be isomorphic. That is, they must have a structure that allows a passage from one to the other without interruption. It is precisely here that Kojève says we run into a problem. Different from the *Phenomenology* which sustains a difference between subject and object, Kojève claims that the *Logic* assumes that there is an "identity or perfect coincidence of subject and object, of the Concept and Reality, of *Bewusstsein* and *Selbstbewusstsein*" (ibid., p. 150). Different from the *Phenomenology* which has a dualist structure, Kojève claims that the *Logic* adopts what he calls a "Spinozist" univocity that treats human historical being and nature as having the same ontological structure. In a footnote

appended to a section of the *IRH*, Kojève argues that an effacement of the difference between subject and object causes Hegel to make an error:

> Hegel's reasoning is certainly correct: if the real Totality implies Man, and if Man is dialectical, the Totality itself is dialectical. But as he goes on from there, Hegel commits, in my opinion, a grave error. From the fact that the real Totality is dialectical he concludes that its two fundamental constituent-elements, which are Nature and Man (= History), are dialectical. In doing this, he just follows the tradition of ontological monism which goes back to the Greeks: everything that is, is in one and the same manner. The Greeks, who philosophically discovered Nature, extended their "naturalistic" ontology, dominated by the single category of Identity, to Man. Hegel, who […] discovered the "dialectical" ontological categories of Negativity and Totality by analyzing the human being […], extended his "anthropological" dialectical ontology to Nature. Now, this extension is in no wise justified and it is not even discussed in Hegel (ibid., pp. 212-3).

Hegel's error is thus the conflation of these two realms by imposing onto natural being the same dialectical structure that, in his estimation, ought to be reserved only for human historical being. As a result, Hegel's ontology illicitly covers over the essential difference between nature and freedom that was maintained in the *Phenomenology*.

What Hegel's ontological monism fails to capture is that "there is an essential difference between nature on the one hand, which is revealed only by human discourse—i.e., by another reality than that which it is itself—and the human, on the other hand, who himself reveals the reality which he is, as well as the natural reality which he is not" (ibid., p. 213). Rather, Kojève argues that Hegel's *Logic* ought to have distinguished between a "dialectical ontology (of Hegelian inspiration but modified accordingly) of human history dominated by negativity" and "a non-dialectical ontology (of Greek and traditional inspiration) of nature dominated by identity" (ibid.). As Kojève explains, it is this dualistic ontology that is necessary for the possibility of history itself:

> History implies and presupposes an *understanding* of past generations by the generations of the present and future. Now if Nature, as well as Man, changed, discourse could not be communicated throughout time. If stones and trees, and also the bodies and the animal "psychism" of the men of the time of Pericles, were as different from ours as the citizens of the ancient city are from us, we would be able to understand neither a Greek treatise on agriculture and architecture nor Thucydides' history, nor Plato's philosophy (ibid., p. 214).

The history of philosophy is a path towards absolute knowledge, a journey that proceeds as a movement of negation. Human history is possible only if it is possible to negate—that is, to *refute*—historical instances of knowledge as it approaches an ahistorical absolute truth, i.e., the end of history.[158] But, for this to be possible, for history to be able to judge itself as progressing through various stages of development, then this truth must be established as one that is relative to a nature that remains identical to itself.[159] Instead, by combining a "traditional ontology, unsettled in its deepest foundations by the introduction of negativity", Hegel was unable "to account for the identical subsistence of the spatial natural being" (Kojève, 2020, p. 211).

[158] In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel explains that "philosophies have not only contradicted one another but also refuted [*widerlegt*] one another. To what extent? What in them is open to refutation [*Widerlegung*]? What is the *meaning* of this reciprocal refutation? The answer is given by what has just been said. Only the fact that some principle or some concrete mode of the idea, the form of the idea, now has validity as the highest idea, and as idea as such. In its own era it is, to be sure, its highest idea; but because we have grasped the activity of thinking as self-developing, what was highest steps down, no longer being the highest, although it remains a necessary element for the following stage. So, the content has not been refuted; all that has been refuted is the philosophy's status as the highest, definitive stage" (Hegel, 2009, p. 59).

[159] Although Kojève, for the most part, avoids discussion of the *Logic* in his lectures, he does address this particular issue of "ontological monism" as it manifests itself in the *Encyclopaedia* where "Nature is described as having the same dialectical structure as human reality" (Kojève, 1980, p. 217). Kojève refers to some of the more notorious passages in the second volume of the *Encyclopaedia*, where Hegel tries to extend the reach of his system into the realm of nature where he attempts to provide an explanation for light, gas, minerals, plants, vegetables, etc. For Kojève, this follows too closely Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and thus leads Hegel towards an "absurd philosophy of Nature" and an "insensate critique of Newton" (ibid., p. 146). The first, and most notorious example, of Hegel's idiosyncratic approach to understanding nature is found in his much-denounced *1801 Dissertation* on "The Orbits of the Planets" which shares commonalities of his later, more mature *Naturphilosophie*. It is perhaps most well-known for his infamous attempt to explain the comparative distances of the planets from the sun using a sequence of numbers adopted from Plato's *Timaeus* (Hegel, 1987). For more on this peculiar aspect of Hegel's philosophy of nature, see, (Beaumont, 1954).

According to Kojève, Hegel's ontology fails to capture this difference between natural and human historical being: "Hegel never even admitted the possibility of questioning the traditional monistic postulate: all that is in one and the same way. And it is this which makes his ontology—on the whole—a complete, albeit grandiose, failure" (ibid.). It is for this reason, that is, with an eye toward closing the system that Hegel's ontology unwittingly leaves open, that Kojève explained that he must "renounce Hegelian monism" and, in so doing, "consciously part ways with that great philosopher" (Kojève, 2009, p. 350). This parting of ways with Hegel means that he must tether his ontology to a different set of coordinates. We are told that the first, albeit "insufficient attempt at a dualistic ontology was made by Kant, and it is in this that his unequaled greatness resides" (Kojève, 1980, p. 215). The deficiency of Kant's dualism (as it concerns the possibility of becoming systematic, that is) was covered in the previous chapter; what we will focus on in this chapter is how it was rejuvenated in the 20th century. For Kojève, "since Kant, Heidegger seems to be the first to have posed the problem of a dual ontology" (ibid.). More specifically, it is in *BT* that Kojève locates a route that avoids Hegel's error and thus points the way to an ontology that, at least ostensibly, allows for the completion of the system:

> Heidegger is the first – after Hegel – to answer the ontological question to its greatest extent. He is the first to ask the question, without assuming the supposedly evident principle of monism. Of course, his ontology remains so far only a plan. Nevertheless, this plan is such as to prevent the risk of repeating, by realizing it, what had already been done, that is, the ontological monism that—with Hegel—had apparently exhausted all its resources. This program is such that it apparently does not preclude the possibility of realizing an ontology that might finally account for the truths about human existence (Kojève, 2020, p. 212).

It is Heidegger's "ontology", which we will now turn to discuss. It is through a reading of *BT* that Kojève tries to overcome Hegel's monist error by adequately distinguishing between a dialectical human and a non-dialectical natural being.[160]

5.3. Ontological dualism: Kojève's reading of Heidegger

Despite the fact that Kojève's *IRH* has been received as a Heideggerianised reading of Hegel, he only made scattered references to Heidegger in this text.[161] In one such reference (a section of the lectures that was not translated into English), Kojève justifies his cross-reading of Hegel and Heidegger arguing that "Hegel's *Phenomenology* is 'existential' like that of Heidegger and it must serve as the basis for an ontology [*La Phénoménologie de Hegel est «existentielle» comme celle de Heidegger. Et elle doit servir de base à une ontologie*]" (Kojève, 1968, p. 39). Immediately following this comment, Kojève goes on to explain that Heidegger's *BT* must be used to augment Hegel's ontology, described in and by his *Logic*, which remains "distorted" (*faussée*). The difference between freedom and nature introduced into philosophy through Kant's critical framework and sustained in *Hegel's PhS* is covered over in the monistic ontology presented in the *Logic* which, according to Kojève, masks the essential difference between the human and natural being. For Kojève, it is Heidegger who is responsible for resuscitating Hegel's ontology by reintroducing a dualistic framework, and it is with this corrective measure in mind that Kojève approaches his reading of *BT*.

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[160] At the time of Kojève's writing most studies of Heidegger (especially in France) focused solely on *BT* and Heidegger's early writings. In these works, Heidegger himself still used the expression "fundamental ontology" to describe his project of asking the question of the meaning of Being as such. Thus, even though it is debatable to what extent Heidegger's work can be described as an "ontology", as long as we keep in mind what is meant by the term in the remit of *BT*, Kojève's description of Heideggerian "ontology" can be defended. In other words, more important than the actual use of the term "ontology" is the way it is understood by both Heidegger and Kojève—and, even more importantly, how Kojève understands this ontology as "dualist".

[161] For instance, Ethan Kleinberg argues that "Kojève introduced the work of Hegel to the generation of 1933 in a specifically Heideggerian framework" (Kleinberg, 2005, p. 84).

The place where Kojève offers his reading of *BT* is not primarily in the *IRH*, as one might expect, but in a series of articles written for *Recherches philosophiques* in the 1930s. In a 1933 review of Georg Misch's *Lebenphilosophie und Phänomenologie*, Kojève unambiguously declares that "with Heidegger, we are witnessing a rebirth of the great philosophical tradition" (Kojève, 2012, p. 66).[162] In 1936, in the *NHH*, Kojève elaborates on this rebirth claiming that it takes the form of a "resolute acceptance of ontological dualism"—that is, of "the essential and irreducible ontological difference between the human-being (*Dasein*) and natural-being (*Vorhandensein*)" (Kojève, 2020, p. 211). At the same time, Kojève admits that a version of this dualism has often been affirmed in the history of philosophy, most notably in Descartes and Kant (as we have discussed), and so the specific novelty of Heidegger's intervention needs to be clarified.[163] The question remains as to what exactly Kojève means when he adopts the Heideggerian terms *Dasein* and *Vorhandensein*. Moreover, how should we understand their relation to the human being and nature, respectively, and, finally, what constitutes the difference between them?

Proceeding towards this clarification, it should be kept in mind that when placed in the ambit of *BT*, the expression "ontological dualism" presents some significant difficulties. Not

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[162] Kojève singles out Misch's reading of *BT* for its attempt to capture "the general tendency of Heidegger's philosophy" as an attempt "to bring together what initially seemed to be radically opposed: ontological philosophy, which describes the ideal immutable Being ('*Sein*'; Husserl) and philosophy based on the interpretation of the history and the concrete life of man ('*Zeit*'; Dilthey)" (Kojève, 2012, p. 62). Kojève claims that Misch makes an important contribution by distinguishing between history and ontology in his reading of Heidegger; at the same time, he also criticises aspects of this reading for failing to unveil a complete idea of what is actual at stake in Heidegger's magnum opus, "it does not make what is essential stand out" (ibid., p. 66).

[163] Ovidiu Stanciu is one of the few commentators to try to unravel the complexities of Kojève's ontological dualism. His analysis, while expressing great depth and understanding, in my opinion gets bogged down trying to rescue Kojève from the charge that Kojève held a misguided understanding of Heidegger. He thus goes to great lengths to describe how Kojève's ontological dualism can be extracted from a reading of *BT* (Stanciu, 2023). While I agree with Stanciu that we ought to take Kojève's reading of Heidegger seriously, as I will show, there are some unavoidable difficulties in trying to square Heidegger's ontological difference with Kojève's ontological dualism.

only is this expression problematic as it concerns Kojève's interpretation but also in the context of Heidegger himself. Firstly, as the above citation indicates, Kojève unambiguously identifies Heideggerian *Dasein* with the human being. While many contemporary readings of Heidegger do not find this equation problematic, that is not to say that it is fully justified. On this point, it is enough to point to Heidegger's own comments. After having received a copy of Kojève's *IRH* from Hannah Arendt in 1967, Heidegger claimed that despite making some novel insights, "Kojève only reads *Being and Time* as an anthropology" (Heidegger & Arendt, 2004, p. 133). It is unfortunate that history has not bequeathed to us a dialogue between Heidegger and Kojève. We can only surmise that Kojève would not have mounted much of a defence to Heidegger's criticism. After all, Kojève does explicitly (and repeatedly) refer to *BT* as a "phenomenological anthropology" in both the *IRH* and elsewhere. Indeed, I see no reason to dispute Heidegger's allegation; the only question that is pertinent is what, precisely, is the intention and implication of Kojève's equation of *Dasein* with the human being. For this, let us first revisit what *Dasein* means in the context of *BT* itself.

Heidegger famously mounted a rebuttal against an anthropological reading of *BT* in his "Letter on Humanism" (1949), where he singled out Sartre's particular brand of "existentialism" that remains tied to a metaphysical—which is to say, subjectivist—interpretation of *Dasein*.[164] Yet despite Heidegger's objections, many other readers have detected an "anthropological" residue in the figure of *Dasein*. Notably, Husserl claims that rather than overcoming the limitations of transcendental subjectivity, Heidegger's analytic of

[164] For his part, Kojève makes no mention of Sartre in his published corpus. That is not to say that there are not convergences between Kojève and Sartre, especially when it comes to the idea of the human as negation and their descriptions of ontological dualism. Descombes essentially conflates the two when he argues that Kojève's ontology is a "humanisation of nothingness" (Descombes, 1990, p. 9). However, as Geroulanos points out, whereas "the humanisation of nothingness could be said to occur in Sartre, in Kojève the gesture is different—toward a 'nothingisation' or erasure of the human" (Geroulanos, 2010, p. 353).

Dasein parades as an anthropology disguised as ontology (Husserl, 1997, p. 372). Those who hold Husserl's view tend to lean on certain passages that seem to problematically locate *Dasein* within the ambit of the *anthropo*s. For instance, Heidegger claims that "fundamental ontology, from which alone all other ontologies can take their rise, must be sought in the existential analytic of *Dasein*" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 34). When coupled with Heidegger's repeated assertions that *Dasein* is the kind of Being which belongs to those entities which "we ourselves are" (ibid., pp. 75, 241, 314, 359), there is no doubt that, in some way, the human is the axis on which *BT* turns. Heidegger seems to confirm this with the use of the predicate "human" (*Mensch*) to designate Dasein throughout the text (ibid., pp. 76, 433, 453). However, what Heidegger does stress unequivocally is that *Dasein* should not be confused with the subject: "one of our first tasks will be to prove that if we posit an 'I' or subject as that which is proximally given, we shall completely miss the phenomenal content of *Dasein*" (ibid., p. 72). Similarly, Heidegger also insists that *Dasein* is something wholly different from the definition of man as *animal rationale*—that is, an animal being endowed with the power of reason—which reduces *Dasein* to an entity that is objectively present-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*) and thus obscures its more fundamental phenomenological basis. For this reason, Heidegger claims that he is not being "terminologically arbitrary" when he avoids the "terms as well as the expression 'life' and 'man' in designating those entities that we ourselves are" (ibid.). What is at stake is an understanding of *Dasein* which is in some way related to the human being without being reducible to what we normally recognise as "anthropological" categories.

In this context, Heideggerian "fundamental ontology" can be understood as a conversation with Kant's transcendental philosophy. According to Heidegger, there is an inadequacy in Kant's view of the subject which originates in a deficient—or, perhaps, more accurately, an absent—ontology: "in the first place, [Kant] altogether neglected the problem of Being; and, in connection with this, he failed to provide an ontology with *Dasein* as its theme

or (to put this in Kantian language) to give a preliminary ontological analytic of the subjectivity of the subject" (ibid., p. 45).[165] In order to lay the ground for asking the Kantian question "*Was ist der Mensch?*", what is first required is, what Heidegger calls, an existential analytic of *Dasein*:[166]

> in the existential analytic of *Dasein* we also make headway with a task which is hardly less pressing than that of the question of Being itself—the task of laying bare that *a priori* basis which must be visible before the question of 'what man is' can be discussed philosophically. The existential analytic of *Dasein* comes before any psychology or anthropology, and certainly before any biology (Heidegger, 1962, p. 71).

That is to say, if anthropology is understood generally as the *scientific* study of the human being (*Menschenkunde*), then Heidegger's analytic of *Dasein* is not an anthropology but instead serves as its preparation or propaedeutic. Scientific disciplines which aim to derive a somatic, biological, psychological understanding of the human being remain too empirical to grasp the radical "there-ness" of the *Dasein* of the human and therefore the even more elusive problem of the question of Being (*Seinsfrage*). That is to say, before the question "What is the human being?" can be considered in its scientific clothing, Heidegger contends that the more primordial question of Being—or, rather, the question of the meaning of Being—must be addressed.

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[165] In the context of his reading of Kant, Heidegger uses the terms ontological and transcendental interchangeably. So, when he says that Kant fails to give a preliminary ontological analytic of subjectivity of the subject, what Heidegger is saying is that Kant does not give an adequate transcendental analytic of the subjectivity of the subject.

[166] This is something that Heidegger both repeats and engages in more detail in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (itself an extension of *BT* in the sense of a "digression" towards a further questioning of the meaning of Being). In the preface to the fourth edition, Heidegger says that the *Kantbuch* remains an "introduction, attempted by means of a questionable digression, to the further questionability which persists concerning the Question of Being set forth in *Being and Time*"; moreover, he says that this further questioning is motivated by a disputation with Ernst Cassirer in connection with the issue of philosophical anthropology (Heidegger, 1997, p. xvii).

On the very first page of *BT*, in a brief, untitled section which precedes the introduction, Heidegger declares that "the aim of the following treatise is to work out the question of the meaning of Being and to do so concretely" (ibid., p. 19).[167] For this, Heidegger says that we must move beyond the transcendental analytic (of the faculties of the subject) and toward an existential analytic of *Dasein*—a fundamental ontology—oriented towards unveiling "the unitary primordial structure of *Dasein*'s Being, in terms of which its possibilities and the ways for it 'to be' are ontologically determined" (ibid., p. 169). *Dasein* is a special kind of entity, an entity that does not just occur alongside and amongst all other entities but is "distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it" (ibid., p. 32). What this means is that *Dasein*—the entity that we ourselves are—is the kind of entity that is able to ask the question of the meaning of Being and, thus, transcend its mere entity-ness (*Seiendeheit*). It is in this mode of Being that "*Dasein* understands itself in its Being, and that to some degree it does so explicitly. It is peculiar to this entity that with and through its Being, this Being is disclosed to it" (ibid.). As the kind of entity that is capable of asking the question of its own existence, *Dasein* is both the interrogator and the interrogated in the question concerning the meaning of Being—both the framing of the question of Being as well as the condition of possibility of what is framed. As such, is the site of an originary, pre-categorial, "disclosedness" (*Erschlossenheit*) of Being.

As we will see, Kojève's equation of *Dasein* with the human being must be grasped in light of Heidegger's fundamental ontology. I will engage in a more detailed discussion of how Kojève understands the human being through the structure of Heidegger's existential analytic shortly; but before we can do so, it is first necessary to highlight a second (not unrelated) issue concerning Kojève's interpretation of Heidegger. The claim that Heidegger became the first

[167] Heidegger also says that the task of *BT* cannot be understood as offering an answer to the meaning of Being: "the analysis of *Dasein* is not only incomplete, it is also, in the first instance, provisional [*Vorläufig*] (ibid., p. 38). I will return to how Kojève understands this incompletion in the following section.

(after Kant) to propose the problem of a dualist ontology, appears to be an allusion to the more familiar Heideggerian "ontological difference" that describes the relation between ontic entities (*Seiendes*) and ontological Being (*Sein*). As I will now show, on the one hand, there is a connection between the ontological difference and ontological dualism; on the other hand, Kojève's understanding of ontology differs from Heidegger in some important ways that leads to an incongruity between these two expressions.

In *BT*, Heidegger describes an "ontological difference [*Unterschied*] between 'Being-in' [*In-Sein*] as an *existentiale* and the category of the 'insideness' [*Inwendigkeit*] which things present-at-hand [*Vorhandenheit*] can have with regard to one another" (ibid., p. 82). This is a rather dense formulation that needs to be unpacked. Firstly, Heidegger distinguishes between category and what he calls "*existentiale*". Very schematically, categories refer to the ontic structure, i.e., concrete properties and characteristics, of things that have the determinate character of existence. *Existentiale*, on the other hand, refer to the ontological structure of *Dasein*, i.e., to the "there" of Being, the condition of possibility for the disclosedness of ontic entities. It should be pointed out that although some commentators distinguish between these two terms by saying that existentiale applies only to *Dasein* and category to entities within the world, this is not precise. As we have just seen, *Dasein* is itself a kind of entity; what makes *Dasein* different from other entities is its mode of Being which transcends or "stands out" (*ekstasis*) from the world of entities as its condition of possibility. That is to say, *Dasein* is unique amongst entities in that it is the "ontico-ontological condition for the possibility of any ontologies" (ibid., p. 34). *Dasein* is capable of being ontologically interrogated as the site of the question of the meaning of Being only insofar as it is also an ontic entity that has the determinate character of existence. Thus, the difference between *Seiendes* and *Sein* is doubly inscribed, both internally within *Dasein* itself as well as within the horizon that divides between *Dasein* and the kind of entities that are present-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*).

According to Heidegger, the distinction between ontology and the ontic must be understood as the difference between the meaning of "Being-in" (*In-Sein*) and "insideness" (*Inwendigkeit*):

> What is meant by "*Being-in*"? Our proximal reaction is to round out this expression to "Being-in 'in the world'" [*In-der-Welt-sein*], and we are inclined to understand this Being-in as 'Being in something' ["*Sein in…*"]. This latter term designates the kind of Being which an entity has when it is 'in' another one, as the water is 'in' the glass, or the garment is 'in' the cupboard. By this 'in' we mean the relationship of Being which two entities extended 'in' space have to each other with regard to their location in that space (ibid., p. 79).

Like water in a glass, ontic entities appear "inside" space and "at" a specific location. Any kind of entity that can be described in this way has the kind of Being that Heidegger calls *Vorhandenheit*, a present-at-handness described using categories. To describe this "everyday" manner in which the world is presented, Heidegger borrows from the work of biologist Jakob von Uexküll and his concept of *Umwelt*. Literally meaning the "world-around" (or "surrounding world"), *Umwelt* describes a world of subjective experience that is unique to the creature that discloses it: "a soap bubble around each creature to represent its own world, filled with the perceptions which it alone knows" (Uexküll, 2010, p. 43). However, different from Uexküll who claims that there are as many different *Umwelten* as creatures themselves, Heidegger restricts his analysis to the surrounding world of human *Dasein*. What "Being-in" seeks to describe is not the relations that take place within the soap bubble that is the world that surrounds the human being in which it is absorbed but rather the disclosure of this *Umwelt* itself: "Because *Dasein* is essentially an entity with Being-in, it can explicitly discover those entities which it encounters environmentally (*umweltlich*), it can know them, it can avail itself of them, it can have the 'world'" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 84). In other words, Being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*) serves as a fundamental structure of the "thereness" of *Dasein*'s Being

which is essentially different from how present-at-hand entities are contained "inside" this world.

To help explain this even further, we can make note of an analogy that is commonly employed by Heidegger—namely, light. He explains that as *lumen naturale*, *Dasein* illuminates in such a way that "Being-in-the-world is cleared [*gelichtet*] in itself, not through any other entity, but in such a way that it is itself the clearing: "Only for an entity which is existentially cleared in this way does that which is present-at-hand become accessible in the light" (ibid., p. 171). Heidegger is here playing off the German word *Lichtung*, which is cognate of the noun *Licht* ("light") and is often used in the context of "clearing" or "unconcealment" as in an opening in the woods that allows light to shine through. Understood in this context, the ontological constitution of *Dasein*, as the "there" of "Being", creates an opening to let light into the world and brings the world of objectively present entities into view *as* objectively present. The clearing must therefore be understood not as something that occurs in space but rather as an opening that makes the space within which entities first appear (*as* entities) possible. It is only because of the clearing made possible by the kind of entity which has Being-in-the-world as its way of Being that entities inside the world are made present (*as* entities), i.e., unconcealed. Because *Dasein* is not merely an entity (present-at-hand, that is, that has or can be taken as having objective presence), any attempt to reify it using categories inevitably fails to grasp its essential transcendence of its entity-ness. *Dasein* is not subject, nor object, nor any kind of substance: it is a no-thing. That is not to say that *Dasein is* nothing; such a determination belongs only to the world of ontic entities. Rather, as that which is the site of unconcealment, *Dasein* is a dark and mysterious wellspring that is "held out into the nothing" (Heidegger, 1998, p. 91), the site of an opening to an abyss.

In his "What is Metaphysics?" essay, Heidegger describes the ground upon which human *Dasein* penetrates entities and brings them to presence, as an original manifestation of

the nothing: "For human *Dasein*, the nothing makes possible the manifestness of beings as such. The nothing does not merely serve as the counterconcept of beings; rather, it originally belongs to their essential unfolding as such. In the being of beings the nihilation of the nothing [*das Nichten des Nichts*] occurs" (ibid.).

This expression, "the nihilation of the nothing" is one that Kojève adopts from Heidegger. In both the *IRH* and the *OPR*, Kojève describes the human being as "a nothingness that nihilates" (Kojève, 1980, p. 215). The claim that the human being is a site of emptiness—a nothingness which nihilates (*néantir*)—is the axis on which his ontological dualism, the distinction between human natural being, turns:

> The human as such is only an emptiness in the natural world, a something where nature does not exist. One must say, of course, that man is present in nature. But one must add that he is only the presence of an absence […] It is in this way that man is essentially and radically something other than nature, than the animal which serves him as support: being their absence, their nothingness (Kojève, 2000, pp. 209-210).

In a way that finds resonance in Heidegger, Kojève understands the being that "we ourselves are" as having both an ontological and an ontic dimension. On the one hand, the human *is* a natural being, present in the world like any other entity; on the other hand, the human being "is not", is non-being, something other than the natural world. The human being is an entity that fills the natural world with its emptiness—or, as Kojève prefers to say, it is itself the "presence of an absence" (ibid., p. 209).

In order to further explain this duality between the human and natural being, Kojève has recourse to his own analogy, not of light, but of a circular ring:

> An image can show that an attempt at a dualistic ontology is not absurd. Let us consider a gold ring. There is a hole, and this hole is just as essential to the ring as the gold is: without the gold, the "hole" (which, moreover, would not exist) would not be a ring; but without the hole the gold (which would nonetheless exist) would not be a ring either […] The hole is a nothingness

> that subsists (as the presence of an absence) thanks to the gold which surrounds it (Kojève, 1980, pp. 214-215).

The hole represents the "nothingness" of the human being and the gold is the natural being that "surrounds" this nothingness. In this way the gold is revealed negatively as that which is not nothing, but rather something. The figure of the ring an evokes an image of "insideness"—but we must be careful. Just as in Heidegger, Kojève emphasises an essential difference between "Being-in" and "insideness". The human being does not exist "inside" of the natural world as water is inside of a glass; rather the human being is that which structures the togetherness of Being-in-the-world. Kojève in fact emphasises his indebtedness to Heidegger, writing that "the human is only real in actuality in his interaction with his World: his being is Being-in-the-World, i.e., the *In-der-Welt-sein* of Heidegger" (Kojève, 2000, p. 404). Similarly, in the *NHH*, he also uses Heideggerian terminology to describe the difference between human and natural being: "the human being (Da-Sein) is essentially a Being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*)" which "differs substantially from nature (*Natur: Vorhanden-Sein*)" (Kojève, 2020, p. 210).[168] And just as Heidegger describes *Dasein* as *ekstasis*, that is, as that which transcends the objective reality of entities, while, at the same time, remaining tethered to this reality as itself an entity, Kojève will complicate the relation between human *Dasein* and natural *Vorhandensein*. As we will show, it is not a matter of a difference that splits between these two domains absolutely; rather, what Kojève describes is instead a human being that transcends itself as a natural being.

For Kojève, the human being, as the presence of absence in the natural world, is grasped through the concept of desire. Although this brings us to a more recognisable aspect of Kojève's

[168] Commenting on this difference between Being-in-the-world and naked, pre-conceptual nature, Geroulanos writes that: "to mark this new dualism, Kojève did not utilise (or even refer to) Heidegger's famous and readily available ontological difference between beings and Being. Rather, subsuming the ontological difference in *Dasein*, he contrasts *Dasein* (*être-la*) to *Vorhandensein* (*être-donné*) in its totality, and he interprets the latter as nature" (Geroulanos, 2010, p. 68).

reading of Hegel, it is useful to retrace some of its features here as they relate to his development of a dualist ontology. Kojève defines desire as simply the presence of an absence. Every animal experiences desire, e.g., hunger which is the presence of the absence of food. Natural desire is the desire to fill an emptiness; a desire that finds satisfaction in the appropriation of a real entity—that is to say, a negation which replaces absence with presence. Although the human experiences the same kind of desire as any animal (that is, as *Homo sapiens*), Kojève differentiates animal desire from what is specifically a human, "anthropogenic" desire.[169] Unlike animal desire that feeds off of real existing entities, human desire is the desire for desire itself: "the desire of an absence, an unreal entity, an emptiness" (Kojève, 2000, p. 210). By definition, the desire for desire is that which cannot be satisfied like animal desire; it does not seek to replace absence with presence. Rather, it replaces absence with absence. The human being "fills" an emptiness by another emptiness, an absence by another absence:

> One can say, if you will, that the emptiness created in the natural world by the anthropogenic desire is filled by the human or historical world. But one must not forget that man as such is only an emptiness in the natural world, a something where nature does not exist. One must say, of course, that man is present in nature. But one must add that he is only the presence of an absence, of the absence in him of nature in general, and in particular, of the animal *Homo sapiens* that he would be if he was not constituted as a human being by the satisfaction of his desire for desire. It is in this way that man is essentially and radically something other than

[169] As Judith Butler puts it, "Kojève argues that animal desire does not achieve self-reflection through desire, whereas for human desire, satisfaction and self-reflection are indissolubly linked. Human desire does presuppose animal desire insofar as the latter constitutes the organic possibility of the former; animal desire is the necessary but insufficient condition for human desire. Biological life, according to Kojève, can never constitute the meaning of human desire, because human desire is less an organic given than the negation or transformation of what is organically given; it is the vehicle through which consciousness constructs itself from a biological into a nonbiological, i.e., distinctively human, being. Contrary to the common belief that desire is itself a manifestation of biological necessity, Kojève inverts this relation and claims that desire is the transcendence of biology insofar as biology is conceived as a set of fixed natural laws" (Butler, 1987, pp. 66-67).

> nature, than the animal which serves him as support: being their absence, their nothingness, their negation (ibid., pp. 209-210).[170]

The genuine *Being* of the human being (its *ontology*) is negation, which is understood by Kojève as an emptiness: a nothingness which nihilates in the natural world.

It is most likely this aspect of Kojève's interpretation that incited Heidegger's rebuke. Although I have attempted to draw a parallel with Heideggerian *Dasein* and Kojève's human being, both described as a nihilating nothingness, Heidegger rejected Kojève's formulations in terms of desire as overly anthropological. When Kojève writes that "what is specifically human, human in a *primary* manner (not derivative), is the desire for desire" (Kojève, 2000, p. 400), Heidegger would argue that Kojève slips back into an ontic determination of *Dasein*; the adequation of desire places the category of negation on the same level as the primordial manifestation of Dasein's nothingness (see, chapter 2). Consequently, Kojève's ontology can be argued to remain tethered to the "naïve supposition" that is common to all metaphysical thinking, one that treats nothingness as "a counterconcept of beings" (Heidegger, 1998, p. 91). And, as we will see, by claiming that Heidegger fails to prioritise the element of negation in his existential analytic of *Dasein*, Kojève can rightly be accused of falling into an "inauthentic" mode that understands *Dasein* only in its "everydayness" (*Alltäglichkeit*). All of this is legitimate criticism. Although his influence was immense, there is no doubt that Kojève deviates from the path set down by Heidegger. As compared to the aims of *BT*, Kojève's thinking unquestionably remains lodged in the "metaphysical" and thus presents a violent reading of Heidegger. Not only do I not wish to rescue Kojève from such criticism, I will argue that this feature of his thought will be consequential for our understanding of his end of history

[170] The distinction between human desire, i.e., the desire for desire, and natural desire is a theme that has been taken up in Lacan's more familiar distinction between desire (*désir*) and need (*besoin*). Although Lacan ostensibly bases this difference on the Freudian distinction between instinct (*Instinkt*) and drive (*Treib*), it is, in fact, just one example where he borrows from Kojève, mapping the ontological into a psychoanalytic register.

thesis, a thesis which claims (as we will see, *problematically*) to describe an end of metaphysics.

In fact, it seems that Kojève is quite aware that he is performing a gesture that runs counter to certain elements of *BT*. That is to say, not only is his reading of Heidegger violent, it is a *consciously* violent reading. In the *IRH*, Kojève claims that this violence is necessary given that Heidegger "has not gone beyond a dualistic phenomenology which is found in the first volume of *Sein und Zeit* which is only an introduction to the ontology that is to be set forth in Volume II, which has not yet appeared" (Kojève, 1980, p. 215). The reason that Kojève gives is precisely the mitigation of the element of negating action in Heidegger's analytic of *Dasein*. It is this attenuation of negation that leads Kojève to assert that Heidegger failed to produce an adequate dualist ontology, going as far as to say that although Heidegger points towards its possibility in *BT*, the dualist ontology remains "the principal philosophic task of the future. Almost nothing has yet been done" (ibid.). Countering Heidegger, Kojève contends that in formulating the concept of desire explicitly, he made some philosophical progress (Kojève, 2009, p. 349). In the final two sections I explore a specific element of this "progress" (and how it relates to Kojève's "project") in order to pave the way for an analysis of the consequences of his dualist ontology on the end of history thesis.

5.4. Incompletion and the Silence of Nature

Kojève argues that human desire for desire is the engine that leads to the unfolding of world history. It is the fundamental element that leads to the original, anthropogenic struggle for recognition, the fight for "pure prestige" that produces the asymmetry between master and slave and the subsequent process of historical development through the work of the latter in service of the former. This is the aspect of Kojève's thought that is most well-known and many excellent commentaries have been written on this topic. What we need to grasp here is that, for

Kojève, in order to adequately differentiate the human being *qua Dasein* from natural being *qua Vorhandensein*, the human being must be grasped as a nihilating nothingness that negates natural being, a negation that is only possible on the basis of the desire for desire. This, in a nutshell, is where Kojève thinks that he must separate himself from Heidegger. In *NHH*, Kojève argues that Heidegger does not take into account the element of negativity in the existential analysis of *Dasein*. Recall how Kojève criticised Hegel for extending his "anthropological" dialectical ontology to nature, which is to say that negating activity is broadened in such a way as to blur the ontological distinction between human and natural being. Conversely, as we have just seen, Kojève argues that Heidegger mitigates negating activity entirely. Different from Hegel, who projects onto nature what pertains only to the historicality of human existence, Heidegger risks conflating human *Dasein* with natural *Vorhandensein*. Using an analogy from Hegel's *Phenomenology*, Kojève states that this conflation has the effect of "ultimately reducing the human-being to the static-given-being (*Sein*) of an inherited skull" (Kojève, 2020, p. 214) and, consequently, poses a "serious danger for any future ontology" (ibid., p. 212). To avoid this danger, Kojève argues that a middle way between these two approaches is required; a path that takes on board Hegelian negation while, at the same time, maintaining the Heideggerian distinction (as Kojève believes it is presented in *BT*) between human and natural being.

It is in *NHH* that Kojève provides a rather detailed analysis of how this reconstruction takes shape. In one of the more noteworthy moments of Kojève's cross-reading of Hegel and Heidegger—one that has rarely been commented on—Kojève claims that there is a link between the Hegelian categories and Heideggerian existentials. More specifically, he draws a connection between what he considers to be the three primary existentials making up Heidegger's analytic of *Dasein* and what he calls the three primary Hegelian anthropological categories: "Heideggerian anthropology reveals/is founded on three primary and irreducible

categories (or *Existentiale*): *Befindlichkeit*, *Verstehen* and *Angst* (with *Rede* [*logos*] deduced from the first two). These categories correspond to Hegel's three primary and irreducible anthropological categories: *Begierde*, *Arbeit* and *Kampf auf Leben und Tod*" (Kojève, 2020, p. 212).[171] The only difference between them is that negating action is attenuated by Heidegger. Action being a delicate matter in Heidegger, the claim made by Kojève must be treated with caution.[172] Kojève wants to argue that a kind of passivity is rooted in Heidegger's ontology which, in the final instance, "is unable to account for the essential human realities/truths that Heidegger would like to analyse" (ibid., p. 214). However, with the necessary modifications of Heidegger's existentials, Kojève claims that we arrive at a "reconstruction of Hegel" that is able to account for the difference between historical humanity and nature. Of course, the "Hegel" that we arrive at with this transformation is certainly not the Hegel that we started with. For Kojève, the "Hegel" that emerges following the detour through Heidegger is a rejuvenated Hegel, one that has taken on board the ontological dualism between the human and natural being. And, as we will see, this transformation of Hegel's monist ontology into a dualism has some important consequences.

In Heidegger, *Befindlichkeit*, translated as "state of mind" or "attunement", describes a primordial mood: "we indicate *ontologically* by the term 'state-of-mind' what is *ontically* the most familiar and everyday sort of thing; our mood, our Being-attuned" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 172). However, what distinguishes *Befindlichkeit* from a psychological disposition is its pre-

[171] Since I have already spent time on Kojève's interpretation of Heideggerian *Angst* and the idea of death as Being-towards-an-end in chapter 2, I will focus here on *Befindlichkeit* and *Verstehen* while keeping that prior analysis in view. The fact that Kojève thinks *Rede*, discourse, is deduced from *Befindlichkeit* and *Verstehen* will have important consequences in what follows.

[172] Filoni is one of the very few who have commented on this particular aspect of Kojève's reading of Heidegger. In a short essay, he explains that the attenuation of negativity is "precisely what marks the difference between [Hegel and Heidegger]: the fundamental feature of Kojève's philosophical anthropology consists in the humanization of the Negative which prevents any kind of match with Heidegger's thought." However, in making this observation, Filoni is very quick to dismiss Heidegger's philosophy as being unable "to account for history" (Filoni, 2020, p. 205). This is a strong claim that is difficult to understand in the absence of a more detailed discussion of what is meant by both action and history in the context of Kojève's and Heidegger's thought.

theoretical, originary character: "the possibilities of disclosure which belong to cognition reach far too short a way compared with the primordial disclosure belonging to *Befindlichkeit*, in which *Dasein* is brought before its Being as 'there'" (ibid., p. 173). As an existential, *Befindlichkeit* describes how *Dasein* always already finds itself in some kind of comportment or "openness" with the world that is prior to all types of psychical or cognitive dispositions. In Kojève's defence, it could be pointed out that Heidegger does employ language that seems to suggest a degree of passivity in the depiction of this primordial "state of mind" which brings *Dasein* before the "there-ness" of Being.[173] For instance, Heidegger says that *Befindlichkeit* discloses *Dasein* as a "submission", as that which "surrenders itself to the world" (ibid., p. 178).[174] Instead, Kojève claims that what is essential is not an "attunement" or "state-of-mind" that "reduces the human to the feeling of his Being" (Kojève, 2020, p. 212). What is essential is to grasp the human as that which is disposed toward the world by way of an opposition. Consequently, Kojève argues that it is not *Befindlichkeit* that serves as a foundation of the ontological structure of *Dasein*, but *Begierde*, desire: "*Begierde* is everything that *Befindlichkeit* is, but also something more: The human who is—and ought to be—by *negating, removing, destroying* actively the given being which is not his own" (ibid.).

[173] This particular criticism of Heidegger is not unique. For example, Karl Löwith accuses Heidegger's failure to grasp Dasein's socio-historical dimension in terms of real material processes enacted by human agents. For more on this, see, (Thiele, 1997).

[174] Such language seems to anticipate the idea of *Gelassenheit*. The word *Gelassenheit*, the nominal form of the perfect participle of lassen ("to let"), becomes key concept in Heidegger's later philosophy and is usually translated as releasement or letting go. In making reference to the term, Heidegger draws on the work of Meister Eckhart. In the context of Christianity, *Gelassenheit* refers to a renunciation or deferral of the human will to the will of God. It can therefore be understood, not as pure passivity, but as an active abandonment into passive acceptance. Heidegger wishes to move away from this interpretation and escapes this (Christian) framework by thinking "outside the distinction between activity and passivity" (Heidegger, 2010, p. 70). In his 1959 text, *Gelassenheit*, Heidegger connects releasement with what he calls the "essence of thinking", understood as a state of anticipation that leaves open that for which one waits.

Kojève also locates what he considers to be a "passivity" in *Verstehen* which is described by Heidegger as a primordial, pre-theoretical kind of understanding. Unlike Kant's (or even Hegel's) use of the same term, Heidegger says that *Verstehen*, as an existential, is not concerned with the "what" of an existing thing; rather, it refers to "the kind of Being which *Dasein* has as potentiality-for-Being" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 183). This kind of understanding has as its ontological structure in what Heidegger calls projection (*Entwurf*). Just as in English, the German word *Entwurf* has the meaning of both something that is thrown (i.e., to project something) and also something that is designed in the sense of a sketch or a draft (i.e., a project). Heidegger takes advantage of both senses of the word by describing the character of understanding as that which "throws before itself possibility as possibility" (ibid., p. 185). That is to say, *Verstehen* as an existential does not relate to a kind of understanding of what something is; rather, it refers to Dasein as an entity that is always a "potentiality-for-Being" , the kind of Being that is always "not yet" (ibid., p. 186). However, for Kojève, this always "not yet" of Dasein is not located, strictly speaking, in understanding (which, for him, remains overly passive) but in an active seeking out of what is not yet: "the human being who actively achieves a project (*Entwurf*), thus mastering the thing and becoming its master through his act of understanding (that is, naming) it. This perfectly corresponds to what Hegel states about work (*Arbeit*)" (Kojève, 2020, p. 212). Just like desire, what is essential for Kojève is the way in which the human being differentiates itself from natural (i.e., "given") being. Work (*Arbeit*) transforms natural being into a product of human activity; it is only through this transformation that an understanding of the world is achieved. As Kojève says, there is no conceptual understanding without work and no work without a project, i.e., "the negation or transformation of the given, starting from an idea or an ideal that does not yet exist, that is still nothingness" (Kojève, 1980, p. 48). It is in the realisation of this project that the human being differentiates itself from the natural world: "Only after producing an artificial object is man himself really

and objectively more than and different from a natural being; and only in this real and objective product does he become truly conscious of his subjective human reality" (ibid., p. 25).

The human reality that is produced through work is historical. It is by transcending the natural world through work that fulfils a project, that is, by bringing into the world what did not exist there before, that the "human being is historical world, is 'objectivized' history" (ibid.). Consequently, by excluding and softening the constitutive value of the negating action of desire and work, Kojève claims that Heidegger is unable to adequately account for the dualism between historical humanity and static nature.[175] Importantly, this difference introduces (albeit, in a rather subtle way) a duality in nature itself. By transforming *Verstehen* into *Arbeit*, primordial understanding into human work, Kojève presents us with, on the one hand, a "conceptualised" nature, a nature that is graspable (i.e., understood) only as that which is negated (i.e., consumed, used, worked on) by the human being; on the other hand, he also leaves room for a kind of "non-conceptualised" nature, a "raw" nature that persists outside of the negating action of the human being and, hence, our understanding. This difference is spelled out explicitly in a footnote appended to the *IRH*: "I see no objection to saying that the natural world eludes *conceptual* understanding […] Physical matter is understood *conceptually* or dialectically (it can be *spoken* of) only to the extent that it is the 'raw material' of a product of human work" (ibid., p. 147). Similarly, in the *OPR*, Kojève confirms that there is nature which exists without the human; this nature is that which persists outside of the negating activity of the human: "nature can exist without the human […] its conception in actuality presupposes in fact the existence of the human who conceives it" (Kojève, 2000, p. 214).

[175] Kojève differentiates between human work and the "work" performed by animals. He argues that although "animals also have (pseudo) techniques", i.e., a spider does, strictly speaking, transform the world when it constructs its web; but, according to Kojève, the "world changes essentially and becomes human […] only as a result of work that realizes a 'project'", that is, in the sense that it leads to an *understanding* of the world (ibid., p. 52).

A specific consequence of this division between two kinds of nature is the claim that there is a nature (i.e., given-Being) that is prior to the existence of the human being: "if nature can exist without the human, and has in the past existed without the human, the human has never existed and cannot exist without and outside of nature […] as the negation of nature, it follows that the human presupposes nature" (Kojève, 2009, p. 350). With this observation, we can see that we are in territory that is foreign to both Hegel and Heidegger. We would certainly search in vain for any mention of the non-conceptual in Hegel. In Heidegger things are slightly more complicated. In *BT*, he says that "as long as *Dasein* is (that is, only as long as an understanding of Being is ontically possible), 'is there' Being. When *Dasein* does not exist, 'independence' 'is' not either, nor 'is' the 'in-itself. In such a case this sort of thing can be neither understood nor not understood" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 255). Thus, even though Heidegger gestures towards the idea of a world without Dasein, he quickly dismisses the proposition as utterly meaningless. Only as long as *Dasein* exists can there be an entity that asks the question of its own Being and only then can we have an "understanding of presence-at-hand [*Vorhandenheit*]" (ibid.). However, Kojève goes a step further than this by suggesting that there is, in fact, a world of entities that persists independently of the nihilating nothingness of the human being. Opposite from Heidegger who claims that human Dasein is the condition of possibility of the manifestation of *Vorhandenheit*, objectively present entities, Kojève posits that there is a primordial nature, *Vorhandensein*, that precedes the human as its condition of possibility.[176]

While this particular consequence of Kojève's ontological dualism does not correlate with Heidegger, it does resonate with Slavoj Žižek's concept of ontological incompleteness, an ontology that is not fully constituted but leaves something that is radically inaccessible. In

[176] As Geroulanos notes, "in his attempt to see *le donné* as ontologically significant, Kojève uses *Vorhanden-sein* instead of Heidegger's own term *Vorhanden-heit* (for Heidegger, worldly objects do not "have" Being)" (Geroulanos, 2010, p. 69).

his book, *Less than Nothing*, Žižek explains that "the idea of humans as the Being-There of the disclosure of Being does not mean that entities exist only for humans […] If all of humanity were to be wiped out, entities would still be there as they were prior to the emergence of man" (Žižek, 2012, p. 925).[177] Although these "entities" would not appear in the horizon of Being's disclosure by *Dasein*, they would still somehow persist. For Žižek, such persistence can be glimpsed in the world of quantum physics. While there is no definitive version that explains the mathematical formalisms of quantum mechanics, Žižek's analysis seems to lean on what is commonly referred to as the Copenhagen interpretation. As Heisenberg first argued, in the absence of an observer which attempts to measure the properties of a physical system (i.e., position, motion) the "object" under consideration remains in an indeterminate state. It is only through the act of measurement that what is measured is "observable" in the sense of having knowledge of it as physical object with basic properties. Outside of this interaction, the "object" remains suspended in a probabilistic state that can be represented only with a mathematical equation (i.e., the wave function). That is to say, before there is an interaction between observer and observed, nature can be said to be ungraspable in the sense of being uncategorised. In this pre-conceptual state, nature persists only in the form of a probabilistic mathematical equation—namely, the "uncollapsed wave function" (more technically, a superposition of multiple eigenstates which represent the zero-point of measurement). Unlike some physicists and philosophers of science who claim that quantum indeterminacy is the effect of our limited knowledge of reality, Žižek claims that what this peculiar aspect of quantum physics demonstrates is that there is not only an epistemological incompleteness owing to our experiments, but that "reality itself is ontologically 'incomplete', indeterminate […] the lack

[177] Žižek, for his part, claims that because "Heidegger never confounds the ontological disclosure of entities with their ontic production—for him, the idea of humans as the Being-There of the disclosure of Being does not mean that entities exist only for humans, not independently of them" (ibid.). In other words, Heidegger leaves room for this kind of "existence" independent of *Dasein*. While this perspective resonates with object-oriented ontologists like Graham Harman (Harman, 2002), it would seem to run contrary to a standard reading of *BT*.

that we take as an effect of our limited knowledge of reality is part of reality itself" (Žižek, 2012, p. 925).[178]

Kojève argues that the advent of quantum physics in the early twentieth century showed that science had begun to become aware of its own inherent limitations.[179] Moreover, anticipating elements of Žižek's analysis, he claims that the discoveries of Bohr and Heisenberg also force philosophy to reflect on its own limitations:

> modern physics leads in the end to this result: one cannot speak of the physical reality without contradictions; as soon as one passes from algorithm to verbal description, one contra-dicts himself (particles-waves, for example). Hence there would be no *discourse* revealing the physical or natural reality. This reality would be revealed to the human only by the articulated silence of algorithm (Kojève, 1980, p. 147).

For Kojève, quantum mechanics shows that philosophy cannot explain the physical world of nature, a world that can only be revealed through "mathematical algorithm and not by concepts—that is, by words having a meaning" (ibid.,). Thus, one of the consequences of Kojève's ontological dualism is a division that cuts between the *discursive* world that is the product of human desire and work and *silent* world of natural being that evades the negating action of the human being.

[178] It should be pointed out that Žižek is working with psychoanalytic notions deduced from Lacan. For Lacan, what we refer to as objective reality is formed from a symbolic order. What he calls the Real (*réel*) persists at the limit of this symbolic order, both acting as the condition of its possibility and also completely other to it. For Žižek, it is "this void of our knowledge that corresponds to a void in Being itself, to the ontological incompleteness of reality" (Žižek, 2012, p. 149).

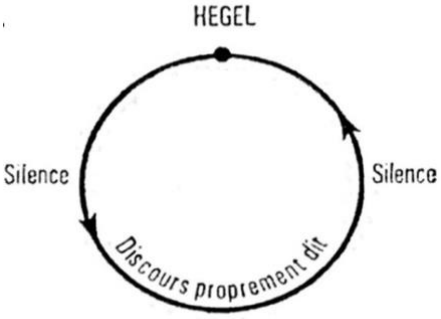
[179] In 1932, Kojève drafted a manuscript, *L'Idée du déterminisme*, which sought to address the philosophical consequences of the recent developments in physics; more specifically, he interrogates the transition from the determinate world of classical physics to the indeterminate world opened up by quantum physics (Kojève, 1990b). According to Kojève, the world of classical physics pursues as "infinite task" of ever more precise measurement to understand the physical world; conversely, the discovery of the quantum world demonstrates that there is a zero-point of all measurement and therefore calls into question the idea of a complete physical system. For more on this text, see (Soler, 2001) and (Geroulanos, 2010, pp. 64-66); for more on the relation between his early work on quantum physics and the development of ontological dualism, see (Raimondi, 2023).

Ontology, for Kojève, must be understood literally as an "onto-logy"—literally, a speaking of Being—Being which is given in and through the discourse that it implies: "The word 'Onto-logy' itself indicates […] that it speaks of Being as such, on condition of not forgetting that it is a question of the Being-as-such-of-which-one-speaks [*l'Être-dont-on-parle*]" (Kojève, 2019, p. 144). As mentioned above, Kojève argues that primordial speech (*Rede*, *logos*) is deducible from the two Heideggerian existentials *Befindlichkeit* and *Verstehen*. I will speak in more detail on Kojève's understanding of ontology as the Being-of-which-one-speaks in the following section, but for now it is important to highlight its importance as it relates to his "Hegelian" transformation of these existentials into *Begierde* and *Arbeit.* The consequence of this is that discourse is deducible from desire and work, or, more generally, the negation of given-Being: "Before its negation by the human, Being does not speak" (Kojève, 1980, p. 144). That is to say, there is onto-logy only where there is negation, and hence discourse, that reveals the Being of which one speaks. What the example of modern physics demonstrates is an absence of negation, a limit to the reach of human action, and, therefore, a place of ontological incompletion—or, what is the same thing, silence. There is, for Kojève, something about the world of sub-atomic particles that escapes our understanding; unlike the materials of nature that we gain understanding of through interaction, there persists another realm of nature that is completely other to the sphere of human action.[180] Outside of the domain of the human desire and work lingers a residual realm that escapes all onto-logy and can be

[180] This sphere of human action is similar to what Heidegger would call the ready-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*). As Heidegger explains, *Dasein* originally discovers entities and gets "to know" them through its everyday dealings (*Umgang*) as it works with them. Dasein's "work-world" (*Werkwelt*) is constituted as a place of things that are used (without any prior theoretical understanding) as equipment (*Zeug*) "ready-to-hand" (*zuhanden*). Of course, the famous example that Heidegger gives is of hammering with a hammer: "in such dealings an entity of this kind is not grasped thematically as an occurring Thing, nor is the equipment-structure known as such even in the using" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 98). Interestingly, in a way that is not too dissimilar from Kojève, Heidegger argues that nature is "historical" only insofar as it already belongs to Dasein's work-world: "Nature is historical as a countryside, as an area that has been colonised or exploited, as a battlefield, or as the site of a cult" (ibid., p. 440).

gestured at only in the "silence" of mathematical models.[181] Thus, Kojève's ontological dualism results in a tension between discourse and silence.

In is manuscript on Kant, Kojève provides a diagram depicting the completion of the Hegelian system as a complete and closed circular discourse:



We are once again confronted with the image of a ring. Recalling the similar diagram describing Kant's discourse in the previous chapter, here we see that the dotted line representing the "as-if" is replaced by a complete circle. However, in this case, the sphere of human discourse (or, what is the same thing, negating action) is surrounded by an outer realm of silence. It is "as if" the gap in the Kantian "system" is here displaced. That is, just beyond the Being-of-which-one-speaks there remains that of which one cannot speak, a place where one must remain silent. What this image tells us is that, for Kojève, there does not appear to be

[181] It should be noted that Kojève does leave room for a realm that exists between discursive and silent nature. While modern physics is not, strictly speaking conceptual, there is an element of modern physics that can be said to be quasi-discursive that is captured by what Kojève calls "energology". As Nichols explains "energology would include the discursive account of how such physics is possible for a concrete human being and is not part of modern physics itself but a necessary part of philosophy" (Nichols, 2007, p. 105). As such, Jeff Love explains that "energology deals with 'irreducibly opposed' elements" (Love, 2018, p. 250). Energology is thus an ambiguous realm between mathematical and conceptual nature, representing a kind of knowledge that is understandable only insofar as it is gleaned by scientific observation. For his part, Pirotte, passes over the subject of energology, claiming that it is the "most difficult" element in Kojève's thought (Pirotte, 2005, p. 66). In Pirotte's defence, it is a term that is first introduced only in his post-war update of Hegel and, at least as far as one can gather from published materials, is not fully developed. As Hesbois claims, in Kojève's attempt to deal with the relation between physics and philosophy, that is, to deal with the relationship between human history and nature, he never produced more than a sketch (Hesbois, 1990, pp. 24-25). Likewise, Nichols laments the fact that "given Kojève's rare capacity to be able to deal with both physics and philosophy, one can only regret that his working out of this problem did not come to completion" (Nichols, 2007, p. 101).

a closed discourse that does not have a silent remainder that accompanies it; and thus silence acts as residual that is concomitant with the completion of the system. This is perhaps what Kojève has in mind when he writes in *Kant* that "although in possession of the circular uni-total discourse, the Hegelian wise man would like to taste from time to time the pleasures and joys which only silence provides" (Kojève 1973: 22). Even in Hegel there remains the temptation to taste from the forbidden fruit of silence. As I will show in the final section of this chapter, it is this lingering, tantalising presence of a silent residual that problematises the idea of completion in Kojève. As such, I argue that instead of revealing a philosophy that goes full circle and completes itself in the shape of discursive wisdom, the end of history thesis is better understood as a tension between discourse and silence and, consequently, between completion and incompletion.

5.5. On the Horizon of the End

As I mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the problem of completion seems to be resolved in Kojève's writings on Hegel where he articulates one of his most well-known ideas of the end of history. The "end" here is concomitant with the completion of philosophy in the form of a closed, circular system, what Kojève calls "wisdom" that is expressed through the "last speaker"—the "wise man"—Hegel himself. However, the fact that Kojève felt compelled to augment these "last words" of Hegel, "updating" them through a Heideggerian reinterpretation, leaves us to question what exactly it means to be "last" in this case. Is it Hegel, Heidegger, or, indeed, Kojève himself who speaks last? In the preface to *CTD*, Kojève confronts this very problem:

> Now, it is not difficult to see that a man such as I, that is, a man who observes, at the end of a life devoted for the most part to discourse, that he could say nothing novel, is naturally brought

> to say what I say in my book, namely that all the discursive possibilities were exhausted even before he himself began to speak (Kojève, 2019, p. 7).

Writing in the 1950s, Kojève feigns humility, claiming to offer only a "simple paraphrase" of the system of knowledge—that is, a systematic articulation of the "discursive wisdom" that Hegel had already bestowed. But if we choose to accept this statement at its face-value, then we are forced to confront an uncomfortable fact. As we have seen, not only did Kojève not provide a "paraphrase" of Hegel—not only was Kojève not interested in what Hegel really *said*—but, more importantly, he also claims that the introduction of ontological dualism, his "Heideggerian" update of Hegel constituted "philosophical progress" over what had come before.[182] If all discursive possibilities were, in fact, exhausted before Kojève even began to speak, then what meaning does progress have in this case? All of this begs the question: how does one continue to "speak" at the end of history, after the "last speaker" has already spoken?

A few years after Arendt had delivered Heidegger a copy of Kojève's *IRH*, she sent Heidegger another essay by Kojève. In this correspondence, she communicates to Heidegger that this latest text is "interesting" for the fact that it is here that "Kojève lets the cat out of the bag" (Heidegger & Arendt, 2004, p. 175). Arendt does not elaborate, nor is Heidegger's response revealing. The obscure character of their correspondence forces us to indulge in a bit of speculation; fortunately, there is a thread that we can grab hold of. The text that Arendt sent to Heidegger was an article published in 1955 in *Deucalion* entitled "*Le concept et le temps*". Although it is a short article (only about 10 pages long), it has a particularly important place in Kojève's corpus since it offers a bridge between his lectures and his post-war "update" of Hegel. The subtitle of the *Deucalion* article indicates that Kojève is after a "true history of philosophy", the full revelation which is found in Hegel's "discovery of the circularity of

[182] In his letter to Tran Duc Thao, Kojève wrote: "if Hegel himself did not clear the way for [ontological dualism], I believe that, in formulating it explicitly, I made some philosophical progress. It is perhaps the only philosophical progress I made" (Kojève, 2009, pp. 349-350).

discursive Knowledge; the identity of the concept as the *Being-of-which-one-speaks*" (Kojève, 1955, p. 18). The expression, "Being-of-which-one-speaks", is not mentioned in his lectures on Hegel but it is one that is thematised in his post-war "update". In *CTD*, Kojève will repeatedly make the claim that ontology must be understood not as a question of Being *as such* but, rather, "if one wishes to speak of Being, one can do so without contra-dicting oneself (that is, without annulling the meaning of what one says) only by speaking of the *Being-of-which-one-speaks*" (Kojève, 2019, p. 138).

To be sure, in Hegel's *Logic*, "discourse" is understood ontologically, that is, as concepts having a meaning and not simply vocal sounds. Hegel argues that truth or knowledge of an object (*Gegenstand*) is only found within discourse and even a discussion about the impenetrability of an object (e.g., Kant) must be determined in and through this same discourse. Nothing can be outside of discourse, there is no escape; and, as such, the *Logic* can be described as a discourse about discourse capable of attaining completion through its own self-referential circularity. It is with this image in mind that we must approach Kojève's designation of ontology as onto-*logy*, as the Being-of-which-one-speaks. As Kojève explains: "all that one can deduce (without self-contra-diction) from the fact (discursively formulated) that one can *speak* only of that *of which one speaks* is reduced to the assertion that that of which one *cannot* speak is not that of which one *speaks*" (ibid., p. 140). On the surface, to say that what one cannot speak about is that which is left unspoken is a mere tautology. Embracing this fact, Kojève says that what this tauto-*logy* shares with all tautologies is the philosophical advantage of "nipping in the bud every attempt to *speak* of the ineffable" (ibid.). According to Kojève, Hegel's System of Knowledge (*Système du Savoir*) is, by definition, "circular" insofar it is able to discursively account for itself taken as discourse. Hegelian philosophy is "a 'circular' discourse, in the sense that it never goes beyond itself while becoming involved in itself and that, in developing, it never moves away from its point of departure" (ibid., p. 144). By virtue

of the completion of this movement, Kojève claims that Hegel's philosophy "says everything there is to say" without transgressing the limits of discourse and entering the terrain of the ineffable. Having reached this limit, Kojève argues that there can be no new philosophical discourse after Hegel.[183] As the first "wise man," Hegel is the last philosopher because he was "the last 'historical human' in the strict sense of the word" (Kojève, 2019, p. 2)—the one who "speaks last". But what does this "last" mean and what are the consequences of such finality?

Kojève's analysis in many ways anticipates what Jean-Luc Nancy claims is the essential contribution of German philosophy to post-war French thought—namely, "a preoccupation with the idea that the *saying* of philosophy, its enunciation, the mode of its enunciation—even its voice, if you like should be present in what is said" (Nancy & Badiou, 2018, p. 7). As Nancy explains, this is a particular German contribution to philosophy, something already present in Kant, and which reaches its most acute state in Heidegger. The question Kojève compels us to ask is where this voice—or, more precisely, this speaker—finds itself when it has nothing more to say. It is in his post-war "update" of Hegel that the problem is both summarised and expressed most explicitly:

> It is not Silence itself but *discourse* about silence that "reveals" the being of silence (of which one speaks) or Being "in general" (of which one speaks). As for silence, one certainly cannot *say* that it "reveals" Being (about which it keeps silent) or nothingness (about which it keeps silent) or the beyond-Being (about which it keeps silent). One cannot even *say* that it "reveals" *nothing*. All that one can *say* of silence (without contra-dicting oneself) is that it "reveals" nothing of *that of which one speaks*. Otherwise, one could *speak* of that about which silence

[183] George di Giovanni says something similar in his editors introduction to Hegel's Logic: "The *Logic* itself is a discourse about discourse – the only discourse which, because of its subject matter, can attain perfect completion and which, therefore, defines the norm of intelligibility against which all other types of discourse, all of them more or less open-ended in their own spheres, are to be measured" (Giovanni, 2010, p. xxxv). This claim also shares features of Foucault's own warning against confusing supposed anti-Hegelianism for one of Hegel's own "tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us" (Foucault, 1972, p. 235).

> keeps quiet, and the silence (of which one speaks) would not be silence of which one wanted to speak (Kojève, 2019, p. 141).

In attempting to speak of the Being of which one speaks, this speech, in one way or another, is pushed to its limits and exceeds itself. Even speech about silence is a transgression, since the revelation of nothing of which one speaks marks the boundary of all discourse; silence enters where discourse is no longer applicable. And although we have visited this problem in many different forms throughout this thesis (be it discourse of the inexistent, discourse on God, discourse on the thing-in-itself), it is most acute in the discourse of the one who speaks last.

It is here that Kojève explicitly confronts (and, in fact, appears to solve) the problem that we have encountered at every turn of his corpus. From the *PJ*, to *Atheism*, to his reading of Kant, the problem has always been how to construct a complete and closed philosophical discourse without falling into the trap of speaking about what cannot be spoken. In the previous chapter where I discussed the role of Kant in the development of Kojève's thinking on discourse and its possible end, I also made reference to Derrida and his comments on so-called "last philosophy" and the last philosopher. I would now like to return to Derrida in the context of Kojève's end of history thesis. Derrida argues, in a way that would be readily accepted by Kojève, that "the last philosophy, in the authentically Hegelian sense, is a philosophy that comprehends in itself the totality of its past and inquires after its origin", which means that "to have the last word, one must truly speak last, and not just chatter on after the last speaker" (Derrida, 2016, p. 4). Hegel both understood what is meant to be last as well as *announced* his own philosophy to be the last. It is in this way that, as Derrida claims, "Hegel's eschatological logic is an ontology. To say that ontology is here eschatology is to say that the essence of being, the appearing of being in its essence is eschatological" (ibid., p. 5). Given Kojève's understanding of ontology as onto-*logy*, as the Being-of-which-one-*speaks*, the question that

must be asked—the question that Kojève *forces* us to ask—is how this *eschaton* is *said* in Hegel's system.

Sticking with Derrida, in the context of the eschaton, he says that there is a close proximity between Hegel and Heidegger, an intimacy that reveals a decisive break. He points out that already in the first paragraph of *BT*, Hegel's *Logic* is singled out as the last moment in the history of classical ontology (a history that extends from Plato) and that Heidegger has no intention to take any steps beyond this endpoint.[184] As the culminating point of the history of ontology, Hegel maintains what Heidegger calls a "metaphysical" approach to the understanding of Being: Being remains a concept that is fully graspable only within discourse. Heidegger too operates at the end of classical ontology but, as Derrida points out, he does not attempt to formulate a new ontology after Hegel. Although Heidegger does not repeat what Hegel has already said, neither does he offer any new discourse which supplants the *Logic*. Derrida describes this proximity, by claiming that in spite of resemblances, Heidegger is distinguished from Hegel "by a nothing, a slight trembling of meaning that we must not overlook", a slight trembling that *says* nothing else after Hegel:

> [Heidegger] says nothing else; he does not propose another ontology, another topic, another metaphysics, and his first gesture is to claim that he is not doing so. In this sense he does confirm the Hegelian consciousness of the end of philosophy. But he confirms it by adding no other proposition, that is to say he surrounds it with an ontological silence in which this Hegelian consciousness will be put into question (ibid., p. 9).

[184] Of course, in the context of Derrida, a lot depends on what is meant by "last". Derrida is referring to "last" along multiple dimensions that involves a certain thinking around "lastness" or the various meanings of lastness. For my part, I am using Derrida to think through Kojève's idea of lastness, not in the sense of a chronological end, but rather as a terminal point in the history of ontology, a point that is circumscribed explicitly by Heidegger through a "destruction" (*Destruktion;* Zerstörung) of its history.

For Heidegger, Hegel's ontic development of the determination of Being unwittingly masks the ontological silence that serves as its condition of possibility.[185] Yet, if one can point to a silence in Heidegger, it is not a silence that sits alongside discourse as its opposite; rather it is concealed by the very discourse that it conditions. As Heidegger says: "Keeping silent authentically is possible only in genuine discoursing. To be able to keep silent, *Dasein* must have something to say" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 208). If we were to risk translating Heidegger into more Hegelian terms, we could say that the entrance to the circle is concealed, covered over, by the movement of the circle which we are always already in. What is at stake instead is an attempt to unconceal the foundation upon which the question can be asked, the difference between the discursive circle that says everything there is to say and a primordial silence that serves as its condition of possibility. As Derrida puts it, Heidegger does not "try to break the circle but tries to find out how best to and precisely to enter it" (Derrida, 2016, p. 90).[186] Another way of saying this is that Heidegger does not seek to replace Hegel as the last speaker; rather Heidegger positions himself as the first non-speaker, the difference between announcing the end of philosophy and the first to stop with announcing.

It is precisely within this ontological silence—the gap which separates between the last speaker and the first non-speaker—that Kojève attempts to situate the end of history. As mentioned in the previous section, the division in Kojève's dualistic ontology is made by a disjunction between the *discursive* world of human *Dasein* and *silent* natural *Vorhandensein*.

[185] As Angelica Nuzzo describes, "within the *Logic* there is no otherness to mark the difference necessary for the logical voice to be heard. As the most original horizon of speculative logic, nothing surrounds the determination process of pure thinking sustaining it in its immanence. Such thinking develops immanently throughout its determinations precisely because it is surrounded by nothing: at every stage of the process, the renewed task is to avoid the pull of indeterminateness, the absolute void of the beginning, the non-dialectical fixation of the understanding" (Nuzzo, 2010, p. 26).

[186] The problem of silence in the work of Heidegger has been explored recently by Wanda Torres Gregory who argues that it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what Heidegger means by silence. In fact, his presentation of silence seems to be performative insofar as he "is often reticent to when he speaks about silence, but he also tends to intimate what he deliberately leaves unsaid" (Gregory, 2021, p. xiii).

But as we have already mentioned in chapter 3 of this thesis, this boundary between human discourse and post-historical "animal" silence is blurred when it comes to the end of history. In the *IRH*, Kojève argues that the end of history is marked by the end of negating action: "the end of human time or history […] means quite simply the cessation of action in the full sense of the term" (Kojève, 1980, p. 159). According to Kojève, the passage from the search for wisdom to its actuality, i.e., absolute knowledge, leaves the human being with nothing left to do. Deprived of its desire to negate the natural world in order to change it, the ontological dualism between the human and natural being dissolves: "not to negate, therefore, is not to be as a truly *human* being; it is to be as *Sein*—i.e., given, natural being. Hence, it is to fall into decay, to become brutish" (ibid., p. 53-54). When the human being reaches its terminal historical point, the human being indeed is reduced to a natural being, an inherited skull.

Consequently, the end of history represents both the apex of human history as well as its nadir, both the full articulation of the Being-of-which-one-speaks as well as "the definitive disappearance of human discourse (*Logos*) in the strict sense" (ibid., p. 160). The manifestation of absolute knowledge is, at the same time, its own erasure:

> Animals of the species Homo sapiens would react by conditioned reflexes to vocal signals or sign "language," and thus their so-called "discourses" would be like what is supposed to be the "language" of bees. What would disappear, then, is not only philosophy or the search for discursive wisdom, but also that wisdom itself. For in these post-historical animals, there would no longer be any *discursive* understanding of the world and of the self (ibid.).

The end of history is neither a "cosmic" nor a "biological catastrophe". After all, natural being is left unchanged because it is unchangeable: " the natural world remains what it has been from all eternity; […] the human remains alive as animal in harmony with nature or given Being. What disappears is the human being properly so-called—that is, negating action" (ibid., p. 158). But that does not mean the end of history is not a tragic event. On the one hand, the end is the realisation of the complete and total philosophical discourse and the possession of

absolute knowledge; on the other hand, the human being is destroyed by this acquisition and stripped not only of "absolute" knowledge but all knowledge whatsoever. Absolute and total discourse is just as much an absolute silence. If Hegel is the first "wise man"—the one who speaks last— then the post-historical animal is the first non-speaker in a world that is devoid of all speech. All that remains is a kind of silence—perhaps a post-historical transhuman realm of algorithms—whereby work and understanding is replaced with automation and mechanisation.

But does this not beg the question? If the end of history is, indeed, the end of discourse, philosophy and wisdom, then how exactly did Kojève think he could articulate this end? In his strained articulation of the end of history, we somehow feel trapped precisely in the juncture between the completion of the system and the articulation of this end. Georges Bataille, one of the more prominent attendees of Kojève's lectures on Hegel, wrote that "Kojève's originality and courage, it must be said, is to have perceived the impossibility of going any further" (Bataille, 1997, p. 293). However, despite making this observation, Bataille himself was rattled by the consequences of Kojève's end of history thesis. On December 6, 1937, two days after Kojève had spoken at a conference at the Collège of Sociology on the topic of the end of history, Bataille wrote to Kojève to express his concerns. Bataille claimed that a kind of residual persists beyond the end of history, a paradoxical form of negation that lingers only in a state of inactivity as "unemployed negativity" (*négativité sans emploi*). Fully embracing Kojève's ideas if only to refute them, Bataille even described his own life as an example of unemployed negativity: "I imagine that my life—or, better yet, its aborting, the open wound that is my life—constitutes all by itself the refutation of Hegel's closed system" (ibid., p. 296).[187] In response, Kojève accused Bataille of "mysticism", that is, of "verbally expressing

[187] This idea of unemployed negativity inspired Maurice Blanchot's idea of an inherent form of incompletion indicating a movement beyond itself what he called a kind of 'unworking' (*désoeuvrement*). More than simple idleness, like *négativité sans emploi*, *désoeuvrement* seeks to convey work that contains its own lack (Blanchot,

silence", "speaking of the ineffable" in order to "reveal by discourse only that which obscures it." He corrects Bataille by claiming that if there is a residual that is leftover at the end of history it can be expressed only in silence, "without saying anything."[188] But does Kojève not himself speak on the margin of silence verbalized by discourse? What else is this talk about a post-historical world after the annihilation of human discourse? Despite his "originality" and "courage", in the end, Kojève succumbs to the temptation to taste from the same pleasures of silence that he accuses thinkers like Bataille of failing to resist.

Kojève's end of history is the site of two incompatible images of "man". What we are left with, in fact, are two Kojèves, one on each side of the discursive horizon. In proclaiming the end of history, Kojève is forced—to use an expression of Baudrillard—to jump over his own shadow in order to say what cannot be said. Either the silence of the post-historical animal is still yet to come, in which case history has not yet arrived, or it has arrived and its announcement is itself a discursive impossibility. In either case, far from presenting us with a theory of systematic completion, what we have seen repeatedly is that Kojève can only offer an indecisive gesture towards the end. As Kojève himself says

> Hegelian philosophy is not a truth in the proper sense of the term: it is less the adequate discursive revelation of a reality, than an idea or an ideal, that is to say, a "project" which is to be realized, and therefore proved true, through action. However, what is remarkable is that it is precisely because it is not yet true that this philosophy alone is capable of *becoming* true one day (Kojève, 1970, p. 41).

1993). Interestingly, as Agamben points out, the concept of *désoeuvrement* first appears in twentieth-century philosophy, not in Blanchot, but in Kojève. Agamben argues that Kojève employs the term as a description for the 'being without work' of the philosopher situated on the precipice of the end of history: the philosopher who must strive to occupy the impossible place between the completion of the system and the articulation of this end (Agamben, 2005, p. 101).

[188] Lettre de Kojève à Bataille du 28 juillet 1943, in Correspondance Bataille, NAF 15853 – Ambrosino-Kojève, n° 579, reproduced in A. Kojève, « Lettres à Georges Bataille, » in Textures, n° 6, 1970, pp. 61-65.

It is this "one day" that is always held in abeyance. The realisation of the project that ends history is not a definitive end, but only a "towards-the-end". While striving towards its own fulfilment, the end of history always remains on the brink of its own completion. It is in this way that we must understand Kojève's thought, not as a statement but only a project, a draft, a sketch, a *brouillon* of completion.

* * *

We learn from a letter to Hannah Arendt in 1967, that she had gifted Heidegger a copy of Kojève's *Introduction* along with a text of Kafka's letters to Milena Jesenskà.[189] After having read both texts, Heidegger wrote to Arendt: "My belated thanks for the Kafka letters and Kojève's Hegel book. Both were important to me. The work is reflected in the letters—or is it rather the reverse?" (Hediegger 2004: 133). It is a startingly question. What could have Heidegger understood in these letters that would allow him to see Kojève's reflection in them? The parallel between Kojève and Kafka has already been hinted at (see, chapter 1). Kafka is an author of unfinished, abandoned, and, if he would have had his way, unpublished texts. His own extreme aversion to publishing his works, an aversion that almost lead to his self-erasure, hardly needs mentioning. But did Heidegger perhaps sense an even deeper connection between the two thinkers?

In this context, it is interesting to note that only one half of the correspondence between Kafka and Milena is extant. Kafka's letters to Jesenskà survived; unfortunately, the same cannot be said of his interlocutor's responses. The effect of this omission is striking: What is Kafka responding to? To whom is this discourse directed? Indeed, what was intended as a correspondence takes on the form of a soliloquy—or, rather, a discourse that is in a dance with

[189] Franz Kafka, *Letters to Milena*, trans. by Philip Boehm (New York: Schoken Books, 1990).

silence. In this same correspondence, Kafka unwittingly expresses this exact sentiment: "writing letters is actually an intercourse with ghosts" (Kafka 1990: 223). Could it be this aspect of Kafka's letters that caused Heidegger to draw his strange association? Does Kojève's appeal to "the end" of history, philosophy, humanity, not engage with a conversation that has no interlocutor? As we read through Kojève's corpus we are indeed overcome with such an impression. It is as if, standing on the precipice of the end, Kojève repeatedly sends off letters to the other side, knowing that a response will never arrive. There is no question that Kojève is and will continue to be most well-known for his pronouncements of "the end", the end of history, the end of philosophy, and, indeed, the end of humanity itself. However, despite the number of names that Kojève gives to his end of history—the *Systéme du Savoir*, wisdom, universal and homogeneous state, post-historical animality—there lingers the suspicion that this denouement is utterly unnameable.

While laying out the schema for his post-war attempt of an update of the Hegelian system of knowledge, Kojève indicates that he intended to conclude with an appendix that will serve as "an exposition recapitulating the ensemble of what relates to silence and its para-discursive forms" (Kojève 2019: 6). Throughout this work he makes frequent reference to this conclusion on silence, while only anticipating some of its contents without being specific. However, like the statuette of Buddha that was lost for words the moment he was brought to conclude his conversation with Descartes (see, chapter 1), the promised presentation of an exposition on silence, the horizon that marks both the limits of discourse and Kojève's thought as whole, never materialised. The capstone that is meant to complete his update of Hegel and, thus, the *Systéme du Savoir*, is introduced only by way of its absence. Yet, far from an omission, an oversight displaying a lack of philosophical rigour, what we are in fact presented with is a conclusion in the strongest possible sense of the term. In fact, the only conclusion that Kojève could have possibly presented us with while remaining consistent. That is to say, the very

absence of a conclusion is, in fact, emblematic of Kojève thinking as such: a thinking that is itself ultimately an intercourse with ghosts.

Conclusion

In many ways, Kojève can be considered the thinker of the end *par excellence*. From the idea of a *Système du Savoir hégélien* to the articulation of a universal and homogeneous political state and all the consequences of his end of history thesis, it has been difficult so far to associate any idea other than that of completion with Kojève's thought. However, in this study, I have attempted to reorient the standard approach to reading Kojève. Most investigations treat his lectures on Hegel as a point of departure and, consequently, situate Kojève's thought within the ambit of recognition, satisfaction, and completion. By contrast, I have argued that this tendency fails to address what is most distinctive about Kojève's work. Indeed, it has been a curious thing to interrogate the idea of incompletion from the perspective of a thinker who strived—and *failed*—to conclude. By pushing off from his earliest work and extending my analysis to his post-war "update" of Hegel, I have shown that, in contrast to a philosophy that orbits around and culminates in a complete system, a unified world state, or a definitive end of history, what is instead revealed is a thought that is mired in indecision, suspension, and incompletion.

Beginning with his first draft, the *Philosopher's Journal*, I established a methodological approach that continues throughout the study: to read Kojève's corpus as an unfinished fragment, a *brouillon*. This first chapter delineates the problem of completion at the site of the inexistent. Kojève's philosophical point of departure which seeks to describe a philosophy of the inexistent is shown to be located with an insuperable, incommunicable, and abyssal origin.

This analysis opened a path that lead up to his second *brouillon*, *Atheism*, where Kojève attempts to construct an atheistic system. Following Heidegger, Kojève argues against the positivist conception by showing that atheism does not escape the metaphysical presuppositions which ground theistic belief. Different from a theistic system centred on the

idea of God or the absolute, I demonstrated that Kojève's atheistic "system" founders at the site of God's inexistence, described as the givenness of nothing—a paradoxical givenness of what is not given.

In the third chapter, Kojève's political *brouillons* were investigated from the perspective of the problem of completion as it relates to his end of history thesis. I showed that Kojève introduces an ambiguous concept of empire: on the one hand, an empire that is equated with "universal and homogeneous" global state, and, on the other hand, an empire that is understood as coexisting amongst other transnational states and thus acting to delay world unity. I argued that Kojève's thinking of empire aligns with Schmitt's notion of *katechon*, an ambiguous power that beckons while withholding the end of history.

The fourth and fifth chapters investigate the problem of completion through an analysis of Kojève's post-war "update" of Hegel's system of knowledge.

In the fourth chapter, I demonstrated how incompletion informs Kojève's reading of Kant. According to this reading, the innovation of a pseudo-discourse, what Kojève calls discourse in the mode of the "as-if", functions as the key element of Kant's philosophy that distinguishes it from Hegel. In both maintaining while camouflaging over the gap in Kant's philosophy, the "as-if" was what allowed Kant, contra Hegel, to continue to philosophise at the end of history.

In the fifth chapter, the end of history thesis is itself problematised through Kojève's hybridised reading of Hegel and Heidegger. I show that rather than providing the capstone which crowns the completion of the system, the supposed end point of Kojève's philosophy remains suspended in a no man's land between discourse and silence. Despite his own claims to the contrary, Kojève's update of Hegel ultimately reveals the same tension between completion and incompletion that animates his entire corpus.

There are also broader conclusions that can be drawn from this thesis which point to future work. In this study I selected texts from Kojève's corpus that are most relevant to the tension between completion and incompletion in his thought. Thus, the analysis is not exhaustive of Kojève's corpus and there are several other texts that might well be included in order to further my investigation. Of particular note are Kojève's texts on physics, e.g., *The Idea of Determinism* and *Zum Problem einer diskreten Welt*, each of which were mentioned in this thesis but whose subject matter could constitute a separate work in its own right. Another notable exception is the text *Identité et Réalité dans le «Dictionnaire» de Pierre Bayle* where Kojève claims that Bayle's "critical positivism" is a radical denial of the possibility of philosophy itself (Kojève, 2010). This reading of Bayle presents another point of entry into the problem of completion from the perspective of scepticism. The links that this particular work has with Kojève's discussions of scepticism in the *ARH* should provide fertile ground for future study. Finally, perhaps most promising of all would be to extend my analysis to the (as of yet) unpublished manuscript *Sophia, Philo-Sophia, and Phenomenology* (1940-41). In this text, Kojève elaborates on the difference between historical philosophy and post-historical wisdom and sheds light on how the latter can be grasped as a kind of paradoxical active passivity. Several aspects of my approach should resonate with this text, especially as it they relate to Kojève's reading of Heidegger.[190]

In this vein, I should acknowledge that Heidegger played a larger role in this study than initially expected. As I mentioned, despite the importance that Heidegger plays in his thought, Kojève rarely makes explicit mention or references to him, nor is there much secondary literature on the subject. However, as I progressed, the degree to which Kojève's struggles with

[190] One of the major reasons why I did not pursue this angle in the thesis is that the document remained transcribed in the original Russian in the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*. Only very recently has this document been translated into French by Rambert Nicolas. However, as of the date of completion of this thesis this translation is not yet published.

the idea of completion stem from a confrontation with Heidegger became more and more clear. The most significant aspect of this relationship which requires further inquiry is the connection between the end of history and Heidegger's own discussions of the "end of metaphysics" and "end of philosophy." As I have already touched upon the link between Kojève's idea of death and Heidegger's Being-towards-the end, my analysis can be further extended by investigating Heidegger's destruction of the history of metaphysics in the context of Kojève's concept of post-history. In any event, by reorienting the coordinates upon which our understanding of Kojève is based, these problems, as well as other questions regarding our reception of his work, can now be carried forward in future studies under the lens of incompletion.

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