

The Premodernity of Modernity. Kojève's Reading of Bayle

Modernidade pré-moderna. Kojève leitor de Bayle

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Abstract: In this article, I reconstruct Alexandre Kojève's interpretation of Pierre Bayle based on his various writings on this subject, most of which are still unpublished. In the introduction, I briefly present the history and current editorial situation of each of them. In the first section, I analyze some of Kojève's manuscripts to give an initial account of his position on Bayle's concept of tolerance. In the second section, I outline Kojève's epistemological argumentation in his book on Bayle. In the third section, I rely on Kojève's notes for his 1936-1937 lectures on Bayle to argue that his stance differs from both Bayle's skepticism and political liberalism. Rather, for Kojève, Bayle's philosophical impasse results from his transitional position in the movement toward a worldview first consistently produced by Hegel and Marx. In this sense, Kojève's overall reading ultimately sheds new light on his own concept of modernity.

Keywords: *Alexandre Kojève; Pierre Bayle; modernity; religious tolerance; skepticism; political liberalism*

Resumo: O presente artigo reconstrói a interpretação de Pierre Bayle proposta por Alexandre Kojève em seus vários escritos sobre o assunto, muitos dos quais ainda inéditos. Na introdução, são apresentadas brevemente a história e a situação editorial de cada um deles. Na primeira seção, são analisados alguns dos manuscritos de Kojève, no intuito de fornecer um quadro inicial de sua posição sobre o conceito de tolerância em Bayle. Na segunda seção, é esboçada a argumentação epistemológica de Kojève em seu livro sobre Bayle. Na terceira seção argumenta-se, com base nas anotações de Kojève para suas palestras de 1936-1937 sobre Bayle, que a posição dele difere tanto do ceticismo de Bayle quanto do liberalismo político. Para Kojève, o impasse filosófico de Bayle resulta, antes, de sua posição de transição no movimento em direção a uma visão de mundo produzida pela primeira vez de forma coerente por Hegel e Marx. Nesse sentido, a interpretação de Kojève acaba por lançar uma nova luz sobre o seu próprio conceito de modernidade.

Palavras-chave: *Alexandre Kojève; Pierre Bayle; modernidade; tolerância religiosa; ceticismo; liberalismo político*

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Introduction

Alexandre Kojève's legacy in twentieth-century philosophy is essentially related to the seminars on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* that he held between 1933 and 1939 as Alexandre Koyré's substitute for the Chair of Religious History at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris (KOJÈVE, 1968). As has been repeatedly shown (most extensively in AUFFRET, 1990), these seminars were pivotal not only to later French thought but to the development of Kojève's own original philosophy as a synthesis of an existentialist "system of atheistic anthropology" and a Hegelian "anthropology of modernity" (FILONI, 2021, p. 187, p. 184), based on the idea of finite human freedom historically realized in the modern world.

Less widely known, however, is a fact first emphasized by Kojève's biographer Marco Filoni: namely, that Hegel was not the only subject of Kojève's lectures during that period. A significant exception was the course he taught from November 12, 1936, to May 24, 1937, with the title: *La critique de la religion au XVIIe siècle: Pierre Bayle* ("The Critique of Religion in the 17th Century: Pierre Bayle"), whose manuscript, still unpublished, is preserved in the "Alexandre Kojève Funds" at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937). Additionally, the study that Kojève undertook on the occasion of these lectures gave rise to his project, never accomplished, of publishing a book on Bayle with the Éditions sociales internationales, titled: *Identité et Réalité dans le "Dictionnaire" de Pierre Bayle* ("Identity and Reality in Pierre Bayle's 'Dictionary'"), a part of which was written in 1937 and posthumously edited by Filoni (KOJÈVE, 2010). Although this text represents only the first chapter of a projected three-part study, it offers an important key to Kojève's *epistemological* reading of what he calls Bayle's "critical positivism". Finally, two shorter manuscripts, also preserved in Kojève's estate, complete the record of his interest in Bayle, namely a three-page report of his course (*compte-rendu*), written for the archives of the École Pratique des Hautes Études (KOJÈVE, 1937a), and a ten-page note on Bayle and Fontenelle, presumably a preliminary study for his unfinished volume (KOJÈVE, 1937b; on the editorial history of Kojève's book project see FILONI, 2010, p. 10-12).

While Filoni's pioneering account of Kojève's relationship with Bayle, in his preface to *Identity and Reality* and in his biography (FILONI, 2010, p. 9-10; 2021, p. 183-192), draws primarily upon these two latter, more concise manuscripts, neither the content of *Identity and Reality* itself nor Kojève's lecture notes have ever been addressed in detail. This article, therefore, aims at fulfilling both tasks. In the first section, I will briefly discuss some of Kojève's texts already commented on by Filoni (a curriculum draft, a letter to Leo Strauss, the *compte-rendu*, and the notes on Bayle and Fontenelle) as well as a single passage from his lecture notes, to give an initial overview of the political stakes behind Kojève's interest in Bayle, which, at first glance, seem to rest on a persisting relevance of Bayle's concept of religious tolerance. In the second section, I will summarize Kojève's subtle argumentative itinerary in *Identity and Reality*, culminating in a (very) peculiar interpretation of Bayle's "skepticism" which, while refraining from explicit political conclusions, again seems to provide the epistemological counterpart to some sort of practical relativism. In the last section, I will rely on archival material made available to the public here for the first time, namely excerpts from Kojève's notes for his first three lectures on Bayle. I will argue that these pages provide fresh insights into the overall meaning of Kojève's reading of Bayle and, ultimately, into Kojève's own concept of modernity, rectifying the first impression of a mere allegiance to political liberalism. Specifically, Bayle's philosophical impasse emerges here, far more clearly than in any other manuscript, as the result of his *transitional* historical position in the movement towards a consistently "modern" worldview, which, according to Kojève, is attained not by Bayle but by Hegel (and Marx) and implies *neither* epistemological relativism *nor*, as a consequence, liberal pluralism in the sense of a skeptical "tolerance" to whatever political position. Although here I will not explicitly address Kojève's reading of Bayle in the broader context of his thought (let alone discuss its philological accuracy), I will suggest that, for him, "modern" truth finds its internal standard in what he elsewhere refers to as the "universal and homogeneous state". I will conclude

with a brief remark on some presuppositions of Kojève's account, suggesting a possible strategy for an "immanent critique" that preserves its theoretical fruitfulness while opposing its problematic political implications¹.

I. Bayle's concept of tolerance: past and present implications

As noted by Filoni (2021, p. 185-187), it is remarkable not only that, apart from Vladimir Solovyov, Bayle is the only author on whom Kojève ever considered publishing a book, but also that two decades later, in a curriculum written for a conference in Düsseldorf at the invitation of Carl Schmitt, Kojève mentioned his course on Bayle among very few other records. Even more remarkable, however, is that the course there was given a different title. "The Critique of Religion in the 17th Century: Pierre Bayle" was changed into: "Pierre Bayle and the Origins of Liberalism", just as the lectures on Hegel became in turn: "Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the Origins of Marxism" (FILONI, 2021, p. 189). Kojève's retrospective gaze had it clear, on one hand, that a historical-political ratio existed between his philosophical interests in the 1930s – Bayle stands to liberalism as Hegel stands to Marxism – and, on the other hand, that the contemporary relevance of Bayle's concerns with tolerance went far beyond the religious sphere as such.

The association between Bayle and political liberalism also seems to emerge from a passage in which Kojève himself states the reasons for his choice of this particular subject of study, namely a letter to Leo Strauss dated November 2, 1936:

[I'm giving] two courses. One on Hegel [...]; and a second one on Bayle [...]. I chose Bayle because I am interested in the problem of tolerance. What for him was Protestantism-Catholicism, is today fascism-communism. I believe that in Bayle the motives and the meaning of the middle position are clearer than among modern "democrats". (KOJÈVE-STRAUSS, 1991, p. 233-234; quoted in: FILONI, 2021, p. 185)

Kojève's usual propensity for irony might suggest that this reference to current politics is little more than a joke. The content of his letter to Strauss, however, is confirmed and strengthened by a passage of the same period from the manuscript of his third lecture on Bayle (November 14, 1936). Here Kojève, at the end of his preliminary remarks, finally addresses the same problem with his students – why read Bayle specifically? He gives two reasons, "one – 'philosophical' in the ordinary sense of the word, the other – contingent" (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 15)². I will return to the former in detail in the last section; the latter is worth quoting in full already:

As for the contingent reason – here it is.

Bayle's entire thought takes as its starting point a concrete historical situation, namely the struggle – in France – between the Protestant and Catholic churches. Bayle, unable to rally definitively to either of the adversaries, who accept no compromise, seeks to maintain himself *between* the two, tries to remain "above the battle"³, and – by unsuccessfully preaching tolerance – attempts in his writings to justify his own attitude. Now, one only needs to replace the words "Protestantism" and "Catholicism" with "Fascism" and "Communism" to see that our situation is very similar to the one Bayle found himself in.

Of course, Protestantism and Catholicism have nothing to do with Fascism and Communism. But there is the same danger of finding ourselves in the presence of two doctrines claiming universality and mutually excluding each other, and there is the same attempt to maintain ourselves *between* the two and – despite the principle of tolerance – *against* both. And this is why I believe that studying Bayle's arguments, by which he sought to justify

¹ I wish to express my gratitude to Jocelyn Monchamp and the staff of the Manuscript Section of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France for helping me in consulting Kojève's unpublished writings. In the following paragraphs all translations of quotations from Kojève are mine (except the passage from his letter to Strauss) and all italics, unless stated otherwise, are Kojève's. The passages from unpublished writings are given in the original French version either in the text or in a footnote, where I occasionally corrected obvious linguistic oversights on Kojève's part. Research for this paper received financial support from FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia – DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54499/2022.07238.CEECIND/CP1714/CT0027>.

² "l'une – 'philosophique', au sens courant du mot; l'autre – d'actualité".

³ Kojève alludes here to Romain Rolland's 1914 pacifist essay with the same title (*Au-dessus de la mêlée*).

the attitude he took in *his* world, can contribute to a better understanding of the attitude analogous to his that, [especially now?], we would like to be able to take, in the world that is ours.

And *this* – perhaps – is the *truly* philosophical justification for a study devoted to Bayle's thought. For is it not to better understand *ourselves* that we – as *philosophers* – study the thoughts of men of the past? (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 18-19)⁴

The “contingent” reason, therefore, is the actually “philosophical” one and the concrete vanishing point of any philosophical consideration “in the ordinary sense of the word”. As in the letter to Strauss, Bayle's concept of tolerance is transposed by Kojève from the religious to the political realm to justify a behavior – already attributed to Bayle himself – that is, in fact, only outwardly “tolerant”. Two opposite positions are criticized in logical terms, namely, as being at once partial and purportedly universal, and the attitude one “would like to be able to take” toward them is not only a non-neutral third position – a “middle” *between* the two – but also a strictly polemical one – *against* both.

These emphatic sentences conclude Kojève's three introductory lectures, which are also the only part of the manuscript constituting a proper text – the notes for the remaining twenty-three lectures being mostly a collection of biographical information, quotations, and shorthand comments. An overview of their content, however, is provided by Kojève himself in his *compte-rendu* and, indirectly, in his notes on Bayle and Fontenelle.⁵

In the former, Kojève declares that the course has dealt with Bayle's ideas on the “Faith-Reason problem” and has been organized around the historical-philosophical hypothesis of a theoretical split between Bayle's early writings and his *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. At the beginning, Bayle believed in the possibility of an understanding between science and religion because he reduced the latter to the sum of a “cult” on the one hand and “theological and moral doctrines” on the other. The critique of theological errors, superstitions, and the resulting erroneous morality based on intolerance, would enable the intellectual and the believer to converge on a “deist” rational theology and an “evangelical” natural morality in a shared “Republic of Letters”. Later, though, this hope was contradicted both externally and internally: “The manifest failure of this propaganda, as well as deeper internal reasons that, however, are difficult to ascertain, forced Bayle to abandon this first conception [of the relationship] between Reason and Faith. He understood that their purpose was not the same” (KOJÈVE, 1937a, p. 1-2).⁶ Indeed, the guiding principle of the scientist is *critique* in the sense of the search for a logically consistent and universally valid truth, whose procedure, however, reduces knowledge to the negative task of refuting any absolute thesis as contradictory (as will be shown in the next section, *Identity and Reality* is no more than a hundred-page argument for this crucial deductive step). The believer, by contrast, has as his only guiding principle the *salvation* of his own soul,

⁴ “Quant à la raison d'actualité – la voici.

Toute la pensée de Bayle a pour point de départ une situation historique concrète, à savoir la lutte – en France – entre l'église protestante et l'église catholique. Bayle, ne pouvant se rallier définitivement ni à l'un ni à l'autre des adversaires, qui n'acceptent pas de compromis, cherche à se maintenir *entre* les deux, essaye de rester 'au-dessus de la mêlée', et – en prêchant sans succès la tolérance – essaye – dans ses écrits – de justifier sa propre attitude. Or, il suffit de remplacer les mots 'Protestantisme' et 'Catholicisme' par les mots 'Fascisme' –, 'Communisme', pour voir que notre situation est très semblable à celle dans laquelle se trouvait Bayle.

Certes, le Protestantisme et le Catholicisme n'ont rien à voir avec le Fascisme et le Communisme. Mais il y a le même péril de se trouver en présence de deux doctrines prétendant à l'universalité et s'excluant mutuellement, et la même tentative de se maintenir *entre* les deux et – malgré le principe de tolérance – *contre* les deux. Et c'est pourquoi je crois que l'étude des arguments de Bayle, par lesquels il cherchait à justifier l'attitude qu'il prenait dans *son* monde, peut contribuer à une compréhension meilleure de l'attitude analogue à la sienne que [surtout présentement?], on voudrait pouvoir prendre, dans le monde qui est le nôtre.

Et c'est – peut-être – là la justification *vraiment* philosophique d'une étude consacrée à la pensée de Bayle. Car, n'est-ce pas pour mieux nous comprendre *nous-mêmes* que nous étudions – en *philosophes* – les pensées des hommes du temps passé?”

⁵ For a more detailed presentation of these two manuscripts, see FILONI, 2021, p. 187-192.

⁶ “L'échec évident de cette propagande, ainsi que des raisons internes plus profondes, difficiles d'ailleurs à préciser, ont forcé Bayle d'abandonner cette première conception [de la relation] entre la Raison et la Foi. Il comprend que leur but n'est pas le même”.

which only presupposes a subjective certainty “whose evidence, however, is neither communicable nor demonstrable, nor even expressible without contradiction” (KOJÈVE, 1937a, p. 2).⁷ More precisely, not only do biblical criticism and the analysis of theological proofs of God’s existence disprove the illusion of religion as rational evidence, but any theistic metaphysics necessarily leads to either contradictions or Manichaeism. Therefore, the philosopher will have to “abandon every attempt at a rational understanding of the transcendent” (including atheistic *meta*-physics à la Spinoza) and “restrict his existence to a positive and critical study of the facts that impose themselves on his Reason” (KOJÈVE, 1937a, p. 3).⁸ The believer, on his part, renouncing all *theo*-logy to preserve his beliefs from argumentative critique, will renounce all *discourse* as such and content himself with “mute faith” (*foi muette*). This double self-limitation grounds the possibility of a coexistence based on mutual tolerance in the very specific sense of mutual *indifference*, which is, according to Kojève, the political purpose of Bayle’s “propaganda” from his *Dictionary* onward.

Interestingly, almost half of the manuscript of the *compte-rendu* consists of deleted paragraphs and sentences, much of which relates to the fact that the philosophical-political equation at issue has not two but three variables – the intellectual, the believer, and the “man of action” embedded in the *state*.⁹ For some reason, Kojève systematically removed this third actor from his official course report. Its role, however, emerges much more clearly from his notes on Bayle and Fontenelle – which actually again concern almost only Bayle, since they were intended to serve as an outline for a later comparative study that was never carried out. This manuscript deals primarily with the socio-cultural *presuppositions* of what is presented in the *compte-rendu* as a mere result; in so doing, however, it also already hints – in its conclusions – at a historical *relativization* of the position attributed to Bayle. Kojève begins here with a strictly Marxist exercise in the critique of ideology. In the introduction, titled: *Les bases économiques de l’attitude idéologique de Bayle – Fontenelle* (“The Economic Bases of the Ideological Attitude of Bayle and Fontenelle”: KOJÈVE, 1937b, p. 1-3), he derives Bayle’s place in the history of ideas from a comparison between two opposed “economies” – “feudal” and “commercial” – and their corresponding “ideologies”. (A third economy with its ideology, the “monarchist” one, is mentioned, presumably to later differentiate Fontenelle’s position, but only its “mercantilist” analogies to the commercial economy are stressed.) The feudal economy (*économie féodale*) is characterized by separate, static economic unities based on stable property and, therefore, on the one hand, relatively independent of external *social* conditions and hardly in need of central power, while, on the other hand, highly dependent on *natural* conditions. Accordingly, the feudal ideology is based on the ideal of the solitary and self-sufficient “sage”, capable of attaining *immediately* (“hic et nunc”), conclusively and in any external circumstance a trans-historical, universal, and eternally identical truth as an inalienable property, ultimately resting on divine powers independent of man. “Faith” here is the isolated sage’s direct contact with God, and “Reason” is but a “secularized Faith” (*Foi laïcisée*), that is, a formally identical insight into the transcendent, only replacing God with a universe of ideal truths.

In the commercial economy (*économie marchande*), on the contrary, private property is unstable and dependent on exchange, hence on social intercourse, requiring an “authoritarian central power” (*un pouvoir central autoritaire*) to ensure internal and external peace, while at the same time gaining relative independence from natural conditions (one might say, in the young Lukács’s terms, that “first nature” is substituted here by societal “second nature” as an external constraint). The commercial ideology, therefore, on one side, glorifies man’s autonomy *in*, and not above or outside, nature; on the other side, it conceives truth as *mediated*, that is, only accessible through an intellectual exchange with others and itself “located in history” (*dans l’histoire*), i.e., not transcendent and not attainable once and for all, but

⁷ “mais l’évidence de cette certitude n’est ni communicable ni démontrable, et elle n’est même pas exprimable sans contradictions”.

⁸ “abandonner toute tentative d’une compréhension rationnelle du transcendant [...] limiter son existence à une étude positive et critique des faits qui s’imposent à sa Raison”.

⁹ Here and throughout the following, the exclusive use of the male gender corresponds to the linguistic habit of Kojève, who always speaks only of “l’homme”.

only through endless critical revision of partial achievements. This is why the philosophical self-reflection of the commercial economy results in “relativism, historicism, skepticism: if truth is one and eternal, it is unknowable as such” (KOJÈVE, 1937b, p. 2).¹⁰ Moreover, the “Republic of Letters” charged with this collective critical progress requires, like market economy, the “enlightened absolutism” of a strong state capable of guaranteeing peace and tolerance. Finally, “Faith” becomes here something purely *private*, that is, a subjective attitude unrelated to objective truth, while, conversely, “Reason” is *only public*, namely an orientation within the world of objective phenomena known in their (immanent, causal) “interaction” rather than in their (transcendent, meaningful) “essence”.

Significantly, Kojève adds here, at the end of the introductory paragraph, a note in square brackets: “Possibility of a coincidence of ‘Faith’ and ‘Reason’ in a society based on creational *labor*” (KOJÈVE, 1937b, p. 3).¹¹ Drawing on the immediately preceding statements, “Faith” and “Reason” should correspond, respectively, to “subjective” and “objective”, “immediate” and “mediated” – but also: “essence” and “phenomenon”. However their “coincidence” is to be conceived, this aside constitutes the first – as yet isolated – key to Kojève’s view of Bayle’s historical *limits*. In the following paragraph, in fact, Kojève (1937b, p. 3-4) initially seems to identify Bayle’s position with a thoroughly *modern* attitude without any “trace” of “feudalism” – that is, of either “feudal Faith” (direct contact with God) or even “feudal Reason” (Cartesian “evidences”).¹² Rather, Bayle’s epistemological and socio-political ideal as described here (KOJÈVE, 1937b, p. 4-8) corresponds point by point to the “commercial” ideology outlined above: 1) sensible knowledge of empirical facts through incessant critical discussion by an educated public already conceived of as a “research team” (*équipe de chercheurs*), intellectually unprejudiced but politically quietist, precisely because of the never-final character of scientific achievements, which prevents them from shaping political will; 2) consequently, “sharp separation between action and Reason” (*séparation tranchée de l’action et de la Raison*), the former being driven by passions and governed by a state that is tolerant with opinions but intolerant with intolerance itself, i.e., with subversive *acts*¹³; 3) mutual indifference (*désintérêt*) – provided this separation of action and opinion – between the state or men of action, the Republic of Letters or intellectuals, the Church or believers (here Kojève repeats the philosophical-religious arguments of the *compte-rendu*). Ultimately: neutralization of both religious conflicts and epistemic absolutism for the sake of “perfect harmony between the authoritarian secular state and inactive, peaceful, conformist intellectuals” (KOJÈVE, 1937b, p. 6).¹⁴

Already at the beginning of this central paragraph, however, immediately after the statement on the absence of “feudal traces”, Kojève seems to contradict it by introducing a new (and somehow surprising) conceptual pair:

Bayle is an *irrationalist*: “Faith” does not reveal truth; “Reason” is not self-sufficient, because the immanent criterion of “evidence” is not certain.

¹⁰ “relativisme, historicisme, scepticisme: si la vérité est une et éternelle, elle est inconnaissable en tant que telle”.

¹¹ “Possibilité d’une coïncidence de la ‘Foi’ et de la ‘Raison’ dans une société fondée sur le *travail* créateur”.

¹² “Aucune trace de Foi ou de Raison ‘féodales’ (pas de polémique; simplement autre ‘idéologie’ [= ‘marchande’]). Pas de contact direct avec Dieu; impossibilité d’atteindre la ‘vérité’ par une vision directe (pas d’‘évidence’ rationaliste des ‘idées claires et distinctes’)”.

¹³ Specifically, Kojève (1937b, p. 6) claims: “the state must violently repress all intolerant and revolutionary *action*, i.e. any action that presents its driving passion as an absolute *truth*” (“l’État doit réprimer violemment toute *action* intolérante et révolutionnaire, c’est-à-dire toute action qui fait passer la passion qui l’anime pour une *vérité* absolue”). And he adds in square brackets: “See the intolerance of bourgeois democracy towards communism and even [sic! – G.Z.] fascism” (“Cf. l’intolérance de la démocratie bourgeoise envers le communisme et même le fascisme”).

¹⁴ “harmonie parfaite entre l’État autoritaire laïque et les Intellectuels inactifs, pacifiques et conformistes”.

But his irrationalism is still rationalist: the (Cartesian) ideal of one eternal truth is maintained. Only, man has no means of attaining it directly, *hic et nunc* ("skepticism"). (KOJÈVE, 1937b, p. 4)¹⁵

Apparently, Bayle's critical disenchantment with transcendent truth, here curiously termed "irrationalist", is still infused – albeit in a merely negative way – with a "feudal" remnant of "rationalist" dogmatism. Yet this does not really contradict the previous statement, for, on closer inspection, precisely this mixture produces the main features of "commercial ideology" as such. Kojève adds:

Hence the idea of indefinite "progress", of a perpetual "search" for "truth". This search is based on the study of empirical *facts* (natural and human). The "facts" impose themselves on Reason through the *senses* (empiricism, historicism – i.e., irrationalism [sic! – G.Z.]). But (– rationalism) these facts have value only insofar as they reveal "absolute" truth. Hence the need for a *critique* of facts. (KOJÈVE, 1937b, p. 4)¹⁶

"Commercial" ideology is itself still partly "feudal" – this is why it finds its consistent herald in Bayle. Its concept of truth, based on endless progress (in Hegel's terms, "bad infinity") and the phenomenon-essence opposition (Kant's critique of noumenic knowledge), is defined merely by contrast to the dogmatic one, *and only because of this* does it result in a skeptical outcome.

The conclusions of the manuscript cast a sudden light on the philosophical-historical significance of this point. Here Kojève claims that Bayle's attitude only makes sense if one admits at the same time "that there is no 'evidence' à la Descartes" and "that there is a 'truth' à la Descartes, which can be reached by successive approximations but is already *there* and does not change" (KOJÈVE, 1937b, p. 8-9).¹⁷ This presupposition, he says, only applies to the sciences of nature, which deal with an immutable external reality, but loses any meaning when it comes to the human sciences. Precisely this difference was neglected by both modern epistemology and modern political philosophy:

After Bayle, we 1) abolished absolute "truth" (human truth is *created* by the man of history), and 2) extended his conception of the Republic of Letters to the state. This leads to relativism and conformism, with no hope of improvement. (KOJÈVE, 1937b, p. 9)¹⁸

1) and 2) may appear to follow from each other, as current liberalism à la Popper would have it – if truth is relative, then the state should be as pluralist and anti-authoritarian as Bayle's Republic of Letters. Kojève's whole point, however, is that they actually *contradict* each other. If human truth is *purely* historical, thereby losing *all* residual reference to an absolute transcendence, then, according to Vico's principle of "verum factum", it is fully knowable and leaves no room either for relativism or, consequently, for "tolerant" politics understood in a skeptical, neutralist way. Kojève's last sentences sound rather distant from liberal common sense:

If truth is *created* by man, it must be *actively* and violently [sic! – G.Z.] imposed on society. The state must not be without ideology. It must *create* the human *truth*.

¹⁵ "Bayle est *irrationaliste*: la 'Foi' ne révèle pas la vérité; la 'Raison' ne se suffit pas à elle-même, car le critère immanent de l'«évidence» n'est pas sûr.

Mais son irrationalisme est encore rationaliste: l'idéal (cartésien) de la vérité une et éternelle est maintenu. Seulement, l'homme n'a aucun moyen de l'atteindre directement, *hic et nunc* ('scepticisme').

¹⁶ "D'où l'idée d'un 'progress' indéfini, d'une 'recherche' perpétuelle de la 'vérité'.

Cette recherche se fait par l'étude des *faits* empiriques (naturels et humains). Les 'faits' s'imposent à la Raison par la voie des *sens* (empirisme, historisme – c'est-à-dire irrationalisme). Mais (– rationalisme) ces faits n'ont de valeur que dans la mesure où ils révèlent la vérité 'absolue'. D'où la nécessité d'une *critique* des faits.

¹⁷ "L'attitude de Bayle n'a de sens que si l'on admet: 1° qu'il n'y a pas d'«évidence» à la Descartes; 2° qu'il y a une 'vérité' à la Descartes qu'on peut atteindre par approximations successives, mais qui est déjà *là* et ne change pas".

¹⁸ "Après Bayle, on a 1° supprimé la 'vérité' absolue (la vérité humaine se *crée* par l'homme de l'histoire), 2° étendu sa conception de la R[épublique] d[es] L[ettres] à l'État. Ceci mène au relativisme et au conformisme sans espoir d'amélioration".

Religion: Faith à la Bayle = aestheticism. Real faith implies the affirmation of an objective *truth*. It cannot therefore be tolerated. The state must be *atheistic*. Then: neither fusion of the Republic of Letters with the Church and independence from the state [as in Bayle's early writings – G.Z.], nor separation of the state, the Republic of Letters and the Church, but: fusion of the Republic of Letters and the state against the Church, a scientifically based fusion aimed at the *creation* of human truth. [Hegel-Marx] (KOJÈVE, 1937b, p. 9)¹⁹

What is barely hinted at in these few dense remarks is further elaborated in Kojève's lecture notes and will form the subject of our last section. First, however, we need to examine in depth the argumentative structure of Bayle's epistemology – the philosophical premise from which everything else follows – as interpreted by Kojève.

II. Bayle's "critical positivism": a logical reconstruction

II.1. Reason's desire

Kojève's *Identity and Reality in Pierre Bayle's "Dictionary"* (1937), his only writing on Bayle yet published, shows no explicit trace of political, historical, or religious concerns. As a theoretical introduction, it does not even discuss Bayle's *Historical and Critical Dictionary* – which was supposed to be addressed in the unwritten third part – or, for that matter, any other of Bayle's works. In fact, the whole book contains only one quote from Bayle, which does not belong to his *Dictionary* but to his *Philosophical Commentary*: "Everyone knows that evidence is something relative" (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 60).²⁰

While Kojève's lectures on Bayle and the related manuscripts, as he himself claims at the beginning of his *compte-rendu*, deal with the problem of Reason and *Faith*, the subject of his book is the relationship between Reason and *Reality*. Kojève's *goal*, in other words, is to provide the epistemological foundations for Bayle's concept of tolerance, or, more precisely, the complex logical itinerary that "leads" Bayle (from his *Dictionary* onwards) to such foundations. The inverted commas here allude to the peculiarity of Kojève's *method*, whose "reconstruction" of Bayle's reasoning is intended as purely conceptual rather than philological or hermeneutical in any current sense of the word. Kojève aims to show "the origin and the deep ground of Bayle's 'skepticism' or, if one prefers so, 'critical positivism', and of all that results from it – in him as well as in others" (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 13). Such "origin" and "deep ground" ultimately refer back to the opposition between "Reason" and "facts", which Kojève equates, respectively, to "theory" and "experience" or, indeed – following Émile Meyerson –, to "Identity" and "Reality" (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 14). Yet this opposition, in turn, is "contained" in Bayle's writings only inasmuch as it is logically required to make sense of his conclusions, so that it can be presented a posteriori as the substance of Bayle's *implicit* argument:

In Bayle, the terms *Reason* on one side, and *reality, fact, experience* etc. on the other, are rather vague and imprecise. One can, however, clarify them and better understand the implicit meaning that they had in Bayle's thought if one tries to reproduce the "reasonings" [*raisonnements*], conscious or not, that lead him to use them in the way he does, or – maybe – in the way he should have. (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 14)

¹⁹ "Si la vérité se crée par l'homme, on doit l'imposer *activement* et violemment à la société. L'État ne doit pas être sans idéologie. Il doit créer la *vérité* humaine.

Religion: Foi à la Bayle = esthéticisme. [La] Foi réelle implique l'affirmation d'une *vérité* objective. On ne peut donc pas la tolérer. L'État doit être *athée*. Donc: ni fusion de la R[épublique] d[es] L[ettres] avec l'Église et indépendance de l'État, ni séparation de l'État, de la R[épublique] d[es] L[ettres] et de l'Église, mais: fusion de la R[épublique] d[es] L[ettres] et de l'État contre l'Église, fusion à base scientifique en vue de la *création* de la vérité humaine. [Hegel-Marx]."

²⁰ "Tout le monde sait que l'évidence est une chose relative". As noted by Filoni, the exact quote is: "Every one knows, or ought to know, that Evidence is a relative Quality" (BAYLE, 2005, p. 146).

The resulting “Bayle” is admittedly quite different from the historical one. For Kojève, he is essentially a “skeptic” in a very distinct and innovative (that is, *modern*) sense: namely, the first thinker to have cast radical doubts on both “rationalism” – i.e., idealism – and “positivism” – i.e., empiricism –, thereby inferring the philosophical necessity for political tolerance.

“Bayle’s” argumentative path is, thus, a (very peculiar) logical stylization of the history of Western philosophy. Its abstract point of departure is “Reason as such” (*la Raison en tant que telle*) in its pure immanence – that is, devoid of the assumption of an external reality and determined only by its desire for “fulfillment” (*satisfaction*) through true theories or “speeches”, such fulfillment being, conversely, Reason’s sole – necessary and sufficient – criterion of truth. At this level, in fact, Reason is essentially “the ‘faculty’ of producing or creating *words with meaning*” and assembling them into “meaningful sets” (*ensembles significatifs*); therefore, “the ‘reasonable’ man is a being who *speaks*” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 15-16). Reason’s speech, however, must meet three requirements to acquiesce its impulse. It must be: 1) communicable, i.e., reproducible by anyone capable of *producing* speeches; 2) consistent (*cohérent*) – whoever accepts its global meaning must be able to accept the meaning of its constituent parts, and vice versa; 3) provable (*démontrable*) – it must *impose* itself on everyone in a final way, causing Reason to halt its own movement (in Kojève’s words: “my speech must be such that anyone who refuses to accept it and make it his own must renounce *all* consistent speech in general” [KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 17]). This last requirement corresponds to the core of Kojève’s philosophical anthropology as outlined in his lectures on Hegel of the same period, where the key to human history is precisely a dialectic of line and circle, progress and goal, ultimately resting on the relation between *desire* as the motor for creation and the desired fulfillment as pure *repetition* (see LOVE, 2018, on the resulting “paradox of finality”). For Kojève, in other words, Reason *wants to be compelled to repeat itself* by a final truth:

Having produced truth, Reason stops in its own production, for it can neither deny truth, nor replace it with anything else, nor change anything in it. Reason, which produced truth, must therefore be content to re-produce it. Then, the theory-truth can also be defined as the product of Reason that definitively stops its theoretical or rational production. And, if truth does not force speech into silence, it does force it into eternally repeating itself. (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 18)

It is from this one *immanent* need that the entire “odyssey” of Reason (including the later emergence of *Reality*) will follow. Such odyssey is divided by Kojève into the two main stages of “rationalism” and “positivism”, culminating in two distinct forms of skepticism and composed, in turn, of individual stages – respectively: “naïve rationalism”, “critical” and “reflected” rationalism, “first skepticism”; “naïve positivism”, “critical positivism”, “second skepticism” (the latter allegedly coinciding with Bayle’s position).

II.2. The rationalist Reason

At the initial stage of “naïve rationalism”, Reason knows nothing not only of a Reality outside itself (“rationalism”) but also of the possibility of error (“naïveté”), that is, it conceives of itself as a divine *intellectus archetypus* endowed with creative freedom and capable of “satisfying itself by itself” (*se satisfaire elle-même par elle-même*). In other words, it regards any communicable and consistent speech as also provable, hence *true*, by the mere fact that it is pronounced. Significantly, for Kojève, this self-attribution of a creative faculty is common to what he sees as the two extremes in the history of Western self-consciousness, namely, on the one hand, the primitive “magical” or “mythological” Reason and, on the opposite pole, Hegel’s absolute idealism. While the “mythograph” spontaneously assumes that his theory “is true simply because it fulfills by itself the Reason that produced it, halting its production and reducing it to the eternal re-production of its product”, so that this “fulfillment or halt” is the sole criterion of “correspondence” with a revealed “Reality”, such perfect immanence returns at the end of Reason’s journey in a reflected form: “It may be that this Hegelian definition [of truth – G.Z.] is only a fully self-conscious radicalization

of the self-understanding implicit in the Reason of the ‘mythologist’ and the ‘magician’” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 21-22). I will come back to this important point later.

The self-confidence of naive rationalism, however, cannot last long. For, as first unsurprisingly recognized by Hegel himself, “the truth is the whole”: namely, a *total* theory would be required to properly “halt” Reason into repetition, securing its content as both unchangeable and insuperable. Still, due to the impossibility of producing the totality of meanings *in actu*, an individual theory can only regard itself as “total” as long as it is not *actually* challenged by the existence of rival theories, which 1) differ from, and 2) contradict it. Such existence, Kojève says, is a quasi-Kantian “fact of Reason” (*un fait de la Raison*) – a *fact*, because it cannot be deduced but only ascertained, and, nevertheless, a *fact of Reason*, that is, still belonging to its immanent sphere. The consequence of 1) is the *partiality* of theories, compelling for the first time to distinguish “my” Reason from “the” Reason; the consequence of 2) is the existence of *errors*, because “the Reason” cannot be simply taken anymore as the sum of all individual “Reasons”. Rather, while a theory may appear consistent and *provable* to my Reason, the whole formed by conflicting theories is a priori *inconsistent* and, hence, my theory (as well as anyone else’s), as much as it momentarily “imposes” itself on me, is “objectively” unproven. It turns, therefore, into a mere “hypothesis” for everyone, *including myself*: “As a reasonable man, I can reject it, and this is enough for it not to be – for me either – provable, i.e., true” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 28-29). At the same time, however, since naive rationalism has no criterion for the truth of a theory apart from its actual existence, one cannot “verify” any hypothesis at this level except by “actual universal agreement” (which may cease to exist at any time). *Some* hypotheses must a priori be false, but it is impossible to know *which* they are: “If my Reason only produces (unverifiable) hypotheses, the Reason produces, in addition to hypotheses, errors, without being able to clearly distinguish one from the other” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 31).

This stage of Reason’s self-doubt is “critical rationalism”. The two attempts that Reason makes to escape it while remaining “rationalist”, that is, without transcending its own immanence, are called by Kojève “reflected rationalism” (*rationalisme réfléchi*) and “first skepticism” (*premier scepticisme*). The former is discussed by Kojève later as a long “detour” (ranging historically from Plato to Fichte), leading either to a dead end or – to Hegel, i.e., to the (self-conscious) restoration of “naive rationalism”.²¹ As such, reflected rationalism somehow interrupts an otherwise linear path and it is thus worth discussing first. It consists in discovering, by Reason’s self-reflection, an internal criterion to identify true theories. These essentially amount to Cartesian *evidences*, namely, individual theories which, while not expressing the whole of knowledge, do nevertheless impose themselves on Reason in a way that distinguishes them from mere hypotheses. Due to their evidence, these theories cannot contradict each other and, therefore, can add to each other in an endless progress of truth. However, this historically successful solution comes at some costs. The first and most obvious is that, being partial, evidences are also only partially fulfilling, thereby proving unable to fully restore the initial ideal of naive rationalism. Secondly and more radically, Reason is reduced here to pure receptivity, that is, to passive and sterile contemplation devoid of any creative power – in the terms of early modern philosophy, it turns from *intellectus archetypus* to *intellectus ectypus*. This is because such rationalism is “reflected” in a twofold sense. By *reflecting* on itself, Reason at the same time understands itself as the mere “reflection” of *another* Reason, a divine and properly creative one, from which evidences arise in the form of “revelations”. In other words, a “split” (*une scission*) occurs within the individual Reason:

I must distinguish in my Reason between a proper Reason, which provides me with *knowledge* [...], and a pseudo-Reason, the organ of *opinion* [...]. If “critical” rationalism felt obliged to distinguish between *my* Reason and *the*

²¹ As is clearly shown by Kojève’s diagram reproduced by Filoni at the end of the book, which outlines the following succession: naive rationalism; critical rationalism; here a bifurcation that, on one side, prompts toward first skepticism, naive and critical positivism, and second skepticism, while on the other side, at the stage of reflected rationalism, the path goes back through Descartes, Kant, and Fichte, until it reaches the starting point again with Hegel (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 113).

Reason, which for it was the totality of particular Reasons similar to mine, “reflected” rationalism must distinguish within my own Reason between what is in me *my* Reason and what is, also in me, *the* Reason. (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 52-53)

Yet, since “the” Reason is now transcendent, it can no longer be equated to a sum of individual human Reasons, however purged of error and reduced to evidences. Rather, the individual split presupposes a more general split between human Reason (as a source of errors) and divine Reason (as a source of revelations), namely, a “distinction between *my* Reason as a whole and *the* Reason as such, which is now something *other* than the totality of Reasons (as ‘purified’ as they can be) similar to mine, i.e., human” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 54). It is this “ontological” split that also explains the third and fatal limitation of reflected rationalism. For, in its transcendence, *the* Reason ultimately remains a foreign object, whose knowledge is mediated by a *human* Reason still as fallible as “critical rationalism” held it to be. As a consequence, the very existence of its “evidences” must sooner or later fall prey to the same doubt that had paralyzed human Reason in the previous stage and finally appear as *not evident itself*. This “second-degree self-criticism” is attributed by Kojève to Bayle, whose peculiar discovery is allegedly that “what was ‘evident’ to me may cease to be so, and what is ‘evident’ to one may not be so to another”. That is why the aforementioned single quote from Bayle in the entire book appears here: “Everyone knows that evidence is something relative” – or, in Kojève’s reformulation: “It is *evident* that there are no *evidences*” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 60).

The second “rationalist” way out of critical rationalism is logically subsequent but chronologically prior to the first one, for it is attributed to Parmenides. It again requires renouncing Reason’s creativity, but replacing it this time with a negative power, aimed at suppressing inconsistency between theories by suppressing theories themselves in their *difference*, i.e., by *identifying* them – claiming, for example, that two words “actually” mean the same, that two things are “actually” different aspects of one thing, and so on. In all these cases, the goal is “to avoid a *choice* between meaningful sets [...] by acknowledging that in ‘truth’ these sets are *one and the same*” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 34). To achieve this goal, however, destructive identification must be *total*, for the resistance of any single theory would undermine it; and, since “total theory” is unattainable in principle, it follows that the identification must occur “*a priori*”: “Reason must thus be able to identify its products even *before* creating them. [...] It must assert that *everything* it actually produces or can produce is *one*. [...] Which means, ultimately, that all words have only *one* meaning” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 36). Therefore, consistent identification culminates in the Eleatic thesis of the unity of Being and, hence, of the *identity* of Reason, or, in Kojève’s words, in the “uni-total theory of the One-Whole of Reason-Reality” (*la théorie unitotale de l’Un-Tout de la Raison-Réalité*: KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 38).

Unlike reflected rationalism, Kojève claims, “Eleatism” fails precisely by its success: namely, not by internal contradictions, but because “the ideal realized at the end of [Reason’s] path was not that of its starting point” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 39). Of the three initial requirements, in fact, the “uni-total theory” meets the last two, namely consistency and provability, but not the first and most basic, that of communicability – for, once reduced to the dimensionless point of “tautological Identity”, Reason is also confined to “absolute solipsism” and, thus, to the “mute uni-totality” of “universal, necessary, and consistent *silence*” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 40). Reason is now deprived not just, as in reflected rationalism, of all creative power, but also of any content whatsoever; here the rationalist extreme is reverted into its opposite, that is, mystical contemplation and ineffable *Faith*, which Bayle opposes to Reason, as mentioned in Kojève’s *compte-rendu*, precisely on account of its incommunicability. This standpoint is not strictly vulnerable to rational *refutation* – Plato’s “only” argument against Parmenides, Kojève says, is that “his theory does *not* impose itself on a Reason who wants to *communicate*” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 39). Such will to communicate, though, is strong enough to bankrupt rationalism as a whole. Reason, to remain such (i.e., rational), had to proceed *beyond* the uncertainty of communicable and perhaps consistent, but never provable hypotheses; yet the only way for it to do so is to draw *back* into self-adherence and, thus, paradoxically, into consistent and “provable”,

but incommunicable Faith. This is why Kojève calls Eleatism a “first skepticism”: namely, the insight that Reason and the reasonable man “cannot fulfill themselves in and by themselves” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 42).

II.3. The positivist Reason

Here, however, a further dialectical “reversal” (*renversement*) occurs. For, although reduced to Identity, Reason discovers the existence of a differentiated content *in* itself, without which identification would not be possible in the first place. And, precisely insofar as Reason *itself* is now mere Identity, it cannot but interpret this content as an independent *Reality*:

Since reasonable identification presupposes the diverse to be identified, which, however, cannot be produced by Reason, Reason reduced to identification can be mere nothingness or silence only insofar as there is for it something that is not it. [...] It is the diverse that will then be equated with Reality, and Reason itself will be understood as the silent nothingness of tautological Identity. (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 40)

The passage to a transcendent Being is, then, strictly accomplished from within the immanence of Reason, which from “rationalist” becomes “positivist”: namely, “the Reason that consciously appeals to Reality to fulfill its demand for provable consistent communication” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 69). Reality, in other words, is supposed to provide positive contents from the outside, thus restoring the possibility of *speech* that the “first skepticism” denied to pure Reason, doomed at this point as either uncertain or sterile: “It is because we want to *talk* reasonably that we talk about the *real*. The question now is whether we can talk about it *reasonably*, i.e., producing consistent and provable speeches” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 69).

As for the latter question, the “odyssey of positivism” parallels that of rationalism. At the first stage of “naïve positivism”, *immediate contact* between Reason and Reality is postulated. If naïve rationalism assumed that any theory *produced* by Reason was automatically correct, now Reason assumes that it always correctly *designates* Reality. The three rational requirements are correspondingly met. Theories are *communicable*, because linguistic meanings adequately reveal all objective meanings to everyone; they are *consistent*, because the objective “consistency” of Reality is conveyed to its correct designations; they are *provable*, because they rest on an external criterion they cannot interfere in and which, therefore, “imposes” itself on Reason unambiguously.

Already this structural analogy, however, suggests that the epistemological question of the (internal or external) source of rational contents is not as decisive as it first appeared. This is how Kojève (2010, p. 74) explains his choice of the terms “rationalism” and “positivism” rather than, respectively, “idealism” and “realism” (or “empiricism”) – they intend to stress that the only actual difference concerns the *active* or *passive* role of Reason, its Kantian “spontaneity” or “receptivity”. Otherwise, the same considerations that had destroyed naïve rationalism similarly give rise to “critical positivism”: namely, the existence of conflicting theories and, therefore, the possibility of *incorrect designations* (now attributed to “sensible experience” as the source of error). In the history of ideas, according to Kojève, critical positivism properly corresponds to Bayle’s position. If, in Bayle, the notion of Reality is irrelevant at the “naïve” stage and is introduced precisely by critical Reason as an *apparent* guarantee of objectivity, so that “positivism” is properly speaking only “critical”, the subsequent logical steps of “Bayle’s” reasoning dissolve this appearance. The fate of the positivist Reason can be summarized in a few words, for it largely reproduces that of rationalism. To secure truth from doubt there are again only two ways. One can *either*, as in reflected rationalism, introduce a split into Reason (in this case, between “Reason” and “experience”). Reality is then, as divine Reason used to be, the source of truth, and Reason’s self-reflection is aimed at identifying in experience true partial theories or “empirical evidences” – which, however, are no less problematic than “rational” ones. Or one can sacrifice diversity to unity and proceed to identifications, which occur in modern science through the construction of “primary qualities” as empirical invariants and their increasing mathematization – a

procedure no less tautological, at least in principle, than its Eleatic equivalent, for “the reasonable man [...] wants to have consistent, provable, communicable theories by means of *words with meaning*”, and “the ‘language’ of numbers and geometrical figures is not the only language of Reason” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 84-85).

In both cases, however, there is a difference from the rationalist stage. For Reality has been introduced to avoid the Eleatic silence: “It is [...] the existence of a ‘discursive’ Reason that allows man to acknowledge – or, more precisely, to infer – the existence of a Reality independent of Reason” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 86). This means, on one side, that the diverse as such is opposed to Reason. In other words, since Reason has meanwhile been reduced to pure Identity, the non-identical – i.e., Reality – is, conversely, purely *irrational*: “Reason only becomes ‘positivist’ and ‘positive’ when it confronts a real that is *diverse*, i.e., essentially inaccessible, a-rational, irrational, ineffable” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 93). Therefore, the problem of Reason’s “fulfillment” is now posed already at the level of *consistency* and not just of provability: “The consistency of speech can mean nothing other than the absolute Identity of its content. [...] All speech, precisely in that it is speech and not silence, is therefore necessarily inconsistent” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 89-90). The consequence is no less than a “total failure of Positivism”, for, once given its very premise of the Reason-Reality opposition, “the positivist notion of truth, i.e., of the coincidence between rational content (of discourse) and real content (of experience), makes no sense whatsoever” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 90). Even Bayle’s attempt to escape skepticism by replacing the notion of truth with that of “probable hypothesis” does not solve the problem, because the probability of the hypothesis is directly proportional to the extension of the Reality it covers (its “experimental basis”), but “the extension of real content necessarily means [...] a decrease in consistency and, conversely, the increase in consistency means a restriction of real content” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 98). Ultimately, the two demands of Reason embodied by rationalism and positivism are mutually exclusive: “The process of identification distances theory from the (positivist) ideal of coincidence with Reality (conveyed by experience), and the designations, which bring theory closer to Reality, distance it from the (rationalist) ideal of consistency. [...] Any gain in rationality will be balanced by a loss in positivity, and vice versa” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 100). This amounts, for Kojève, to a “second skepticism” that is also Bayle’s final word, since, despite his occasional recourse to “probability” and cognitive “progress”, these notions in him are self-contradictory and he actually abandons “the (rationalist and positivist) notion of truth without putting anything in its place” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 99).

On the other side, though, precisely this sharpened contradiction also differentiates the “second skepticism” from the first one, or rather, it develops the alternative already implicit therein – and this is Kojève’s whole point here. The positivist turn, in fact, distributed the two initial requirements – consistency and provability on one hand, communicability on the other – between the two poles of Reason and Reality, respectively; and, in so doing, it did fulfill its innermost ambition of rescuing speeches after all (“the reasonable man became a positivist to be able to *speak*”: KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 102). Now Reason has *something* to talk about – just not in a rational way. Each of the two “skepticisms”, therefore, also corresponds in a way to a different requirement of Reason: “The ‘second’ skepticism [...] maintains the demand of verbal communication in its integrity. And if Rationalism ultimately warrants a maximum of consistency and provability, Positivism eventually warrants a maximum of communicability” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 103). This is the alternative facing *modernity* after Bayle, or rather, one might add today, already anticipating its *postmodern* outcome – for, in Kojève’s words, “to maintain the rationalist autonomy of Reason” means “to see it die in mystical silence”, while “the positivist appeal to Reality [...] only allows this silent death to be replaced by *purely literary chatter*” (*un bavardage purement littéraire*: KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 104; italics mine). Bayle’s intellectual ends up inhabiting a Republic of *mere* “Letters”. Having chosen fictitious speeches over responsible tautologies, this now disenchanted and loquacious “man of the second skepticism” closes the circle of Reason by retrieving the initial tranquility of the “mythograph”, who deemed *all* speech true, with a reverse logical sign and opposite political consequences:

He ceases again to distinguish between truth and speech, he thinks again that, to fulfill himself, he only has to talk and say anything [...] because he knows that *nothing* he says can be *true* in the proper sense of the word. And this essential difference reveals itself in the absolute intolerance of the mythograph and the perfect tolerance of the skeptic towards those who say something they do not like. The latter, having renounced the search for truth, must renounce the possibility of fighting error. [...]

If, in the beginning, man took his myth for the truth, he eventually understands that truth is a myth. [...] The “truth” of his speech can only be an “aesthetic” truth, and his work can only be purely literary. [...]

At the stage reached by Bayle, he sees the culmination of human existence in literary existence. This man knows that nothing he can say will be *true*. And, if he does not want to communicate “poetic fictions”, he will be content to prove to others that what they say is not the truth. (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 104-106)

At the end of its journey, modern Reason seems to know no alternative other than Parmenides or Derrida.

II.4. Totality, action, dialectics

Since the last quoted sentences conclude the part of the book actually written by Kojève, the existence of such a third option can only be tentatively inferred from a few hints throughout the text.

The key seems to lie in a closer look at the fate of “reflected rationalism”. In a long footnote, published by Filoni at the end of the book as an appendix, Kojève suggests that the “detour” constituted by this variant of critical rationalism need not end in an aporetic outcome and be thus reabsorbed into the “first skepticism”. We have seen that the contradiction latent in the concept of “evidence” or “truth of reason” is related to its merely *given* and, therefore, itself non-evident character, due, in turn, to the split between a passive and finite human Reason and a divine creative Reason. According to Kojève, this split is maintained in the history of rationalism from its Platonic and Christian origins to classical German philosophy and is only seemingly overcome by Berkeley’s or Malebranche’s “idealism”, which in fact still presupposes divine Reason. Now, as mentioned above, Kojève instead sees an actual alternative in *Hegel*. After some incomplete attempts – by Descartes and, especially, Kant and Fichte – to suppress dualism by retrieving some agency in human Reason, Hegel eventually succeeds in both accomplishing and superseding reflected rationalism: “It is only Hegel who restores the unity of human Reason by having it coincide with divine archetype-Reason. He thus returns to the point of view of ‘naïve’ rationalism. In him, ‘reflected’ rationalism abolishes itself: there are no more ‘evidences’, i.e., *partial* theories-truths” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 111-112). Indeed, the condition for Hegel to reestablish a creative Reason without falling back into the uncertainty of critical rationalism is his postulate of *total* theory – a possibility, however, that had been discarded at the very beginning. This is why Kojève, who does not explain here *how* Hegel’s “self-conscious” rationalism differentiates itself from the “naïve” one, appears to insinuate some doubts about its success: “If, then, Hegel was mistaken, if his theory is *not* total, one must retrace the path already traveled – ‘critical’ Reason will show that there are post-Hegelian systems *other* than the Hegelian one, and one will only be left with the ‘Eleatic’ resource” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 112).

The same problem of totality or “circularity” in Hegel had already been addressed by Kojève in an earlier footnote on naïve rationalism, but from a different angle. Here Hegel is said to reconcile not only the specific split between human and divine Reason, but the very opposition of rationalism and positivism altogether. This at the same time allows Kojève to hint at a crucial dimension completely absent from the rest of the book – that of human *history*. The passage is worth a longer quote:

In Hegel, totality is demonstrated through the famous “circularity” of the theory or “system”. By developing the consistent theory, one reaches what formed its point of departure. One has therefore exhausted all its possibilities; and the point of departure being whatever, one has thereby exhausted *all* the possibilities of Reason as such. [...] In Hegel, the absolute apriorism of this radically rationalist conception of theory and Reason coincides with an equally radical aposteriorism or positivism. For, in his view, total theory can only be produced *after* completing the creation of the real natural and historical world; total theory is thus only ultimately true because it reveals the totality of the *real*. But this same theory demonstrates to the (human) Reason which *reveals* Reality that it is nothing

but the (“divine”) Reason which *creates* this Reality by thinking it. For this “divine” thought which “precedes” the creation of the world and man is nothing but the (“ontological”) thought of the man who completes this same creation through his own existence, and who realizes this precisely by realizing that he is producing a *total*, i.e., “circular” theory. (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 23-24, footnote 1)

A thumbnail image of Kojève’s Hegelian anthropology is condensed in these few lines. “Total truth” is possible neither as a (“reflected”) collection of positive evidences nor as a (“naive”) direct creation, but only as a *retrospective* convergence of “Reason” and “Reality”, a priori and a posteriori, into a *produced result*. In other words, *active* knowledge presupposes that the known object is itself human *action*, and, specifically, the transformative action of humanizing what had been initially given as the product of a transcendent agency. This sort of action, Kojève argues in his lectures on Hegel, is either *labor* or *revolutionary politics*. In the *process* of turning the “real natural world” (be it, respectively, “first” or “second” nature) into the “real historical world”, man “completes” the creation of nature “through his own existence”, thereby suppressing the difference between his Reason and “divine” Reason without suppressing any of the two poles, i.e., without reducing Reason to either pure contemplation or pure arbitrariness, but rather *mediating* them. This mediation is self-transparent at the end of the process as an “absolute”, that is, no longer one-sided and hence “total”, truth. I cannot discuss here the important difference that Kojève’s self-labeled “ontological dualism” still maintains from Hegel’s “monism”, insofar as, for Kojève, the historical humanization of the world does not entail a metaphysical identity of nature and spirit, so that the human “absolute” is a *finite* one (see on this AUFFRET, 1990, p. 242-252). However, that the content of this initial remark anticipates the direction in which Kojève’s reasoning was to continue after the first chapter seems confirmed by his only note left for the rest of the book:

To develop in II: “experimentalism” or “technicism”. That is to say: man is Reason + action; he creates theories through his Reason, but he verifies them through his action (= labor): technique. Our science is (globally!) true because cars work. (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 107)²²

All the statements quoted so far are mere allusions to a part never written. There is, though, a long passage in the text itself, which, albeit not directly referring to Hegel, appears to provide further confirmation. It again belongs to the discussion of reflected rationalism. As we have seen, for Kojève, Bayle’s claim: “Everyone knows that evidence is something relative” is equivalent to: “It is *evident* that there are no *evidences*”. Kojève then surprisingly adds: “And it seems that it can mean nothing other than this: Reason can indefinitely overcome itself, either because it remains eternally creative, or because it perpetually comes into contact with ever larger regions of Reality” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 60). At first, Kojève’s “paraphrase” of Bayle’s formula sounds like yet another variant of the liar paradox. How can this possibly relate to a self-transcending dynamic of Reason? Kojève explains his argument by referring to another classic philosophical paradox, namely Russell’s antinomy of “the set of all sets that are not members of themselves”, which should both be and not be a member of itself. Instead of solving the paradox with the introduction of some limiting clause from the outside, Kojève sees in it an index of the *temporal* character of Reason. For him, the paradox can only disappear if the set containing “all” sets is formed at a later time (t_2) than all sets *given at an earlier time* t_1 , so that the logical relation of inclusion is diachronic and not simultaneous. Kojève concludes from his example: “I believe this ‘paradox’ clearly shows that Reason cannot be detached from time” (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 62). The same applies to “Bayle’s” paradox – one can consistently maintain “the evidence that there are no evidences” if and only if the former and the latter evidences are “evident” at different times. In Kojève’s words:

²² The formula “Reason + action” chosen by Filoni, however, is not identical to the corresponding passages in Kojève’s book manuscript and typescript, which in turn differ from each other. There, two symbols appear one below the other between “*Raison*” and “*action*” – respectively, $+/\neq$ (KOJÈVE, 1937c, p. 75) and \neq/\neq (KOJÈVE, 1937d, p. 65), suggesting that action can be seen as both different from (or added to), and the same as, human Reason.

Since [Reason] is not a simultaneous (“spatial”) *state*, but a (temporal) *process*, what is an evidence for it at a given stage of its evolution may cease to be so at a later stage. There *are* evidences in and for Reason, and there *always* are, for an evidence can only cease to be one by being replaced by another *evidence*. And assuming it is *evident* that this is the case (i.e., that Reason is a *temporal* phenomenon), one can say that it is *evident* that there are no *evidences* (in the sense of “reflected” rationalism), that evidence is something *relative* (to a given stage of Reason’s temporal becoming). For this would simply mean: it is evident that there is a *Reason*, defined as a temporal process. (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 60-61)

This, Kojève argues, does not turn the evidences given at t_1 back into mere opinions, since at that time they *were* evident (in the emphatic sense of the term that is required by reflected rationalism), and their ceasing to be such is not a “change of mind”, but rather, one might say, a change of *the* mind – of Reason itself. Kojève’s example here is the transition from Euclidean to non-Euclidean geometry. In its widening, (geometrical) Reason changes its axioms without exactly falsifying them: “The axiom in question ceases [...] to be *true* without becoming *false*”, because “what has changed is not the ‘axiom’, but *Reason* itself”, and what was *and remains* evident to the old Reason is no longer so to the new one (KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 63-64). The paradox that Bayle did not see, then, only needs to be formulated to receive a solution – whose name is not made explicit by Kojève but shines through the entire passage. For the conception of Reason as a temporal becoming, internally driven by a logical dynamic rather than surrendered to relativistic indifference, is nothing but – *dialectics*. From the dialectical perspective, a theory can be both true – communicable, consistent, provable – *and* relative – temporally evolving –, thereby resisting Bayle’s skeptical antinomy. Here, of course, unlike in the footnote at the end of the book, the dialectic of self-overcoming evidences does not culminate in Hegel’s reconciliation, but again in the “first skepticism”, thus concluding the “detour” of reflected relativism. Reason, in fact, is still confronted with the problem of *total* theory, that is, of *ultimate* evidence, and again can only reduce truth to either hypotheses or Identity (as is done respectively, in the example of geometry, by Brouwer’s intuitionism and Hilbert’s formalism: see KOJÈVE, 2010, p. 65-67). This, however, is presumably because the standpoint of *action*, such as Kojève intended to develop it in the following chapters, has not yet been introduced at this stage. One may assume that, once Reason’s change turns into *self*-change, i.e., it is actively produced by, rather than merely given to, Reason itself (in other words: once *time* turns into *history*), then, for Kojève, truth can indeed tend to be “total” by collapsing into the endpoint of total *freedom*. And since, in his reading of Hegel, ethical-political modernity does grant such absolute freedom after the French Revolution in the form of the “universal and homogeneous state”, then the odyssey of Reason also finds rest in absolute or “circular” knowledge, thus “completing the creation of the real natural and historical world” – Kojève’s famous (and infamous) “end of history”.

In any case, it seems clear at least that this end – Reason’s last word – does *not* coincide for him with Bayle’s skepticism nor, consequently, with his political concept of tolerance.

III. Bayle and “our world”

III.1. A transitional worldview

We are now in a position to better appreciate the content of the three introductory lectures on Bayle held by Kojève at the École Pratique des Hautes Études on November 12, 13, and 14, 1936 (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 1-19).

Kojève begins with a remark on the course title: “The Critique of Religion in the 17th century: Pierre Bayle”. This title, he says, only intends to emphasize that Bayle’s religious – “or, if you want, *anti*-religious” – considerations constitute “the center of gravity and the origin” of his thought, as well as its historically most

influential and even its most present-day relevant part²³. The actual subject of the course, however, is this thought as a whole, which is why it could also have been titled: “A Study of the Philosophical Significance of Pierre Bayle’s Thought”. In turn, the term “significance” (*portée*) means that, according to Kojève, “if Bayle’s thought is of interest to a philosopher, it is not *itself* a philosophical thought in the proper sense of the word”, so that the course aims at giving “a philosophical *interpretation* of a *non*-philosophical thought”, or rather, of a thought whose interest only lies in its non-philosophical elements, since the philosophical ones are “devoid of value, due to their lack of depth, originality, and... *truth*” (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 1-2)²⁴.

To justify this judgment, Kojève attempts a schematic definition of “philosophy” that partly overlaps with his argument in *Identity and Reality*. Instead of true or false “theories”, he speaks here of the contradictory plurality of “world images” (*images du monde*), or, more accurately, of *Weltanschauungen* – the German technical term indicating specifically that the image in question is *total*, “that is, an image that involves the whole of the natural *and* cultural, historical world, including the man who has this *Weltanschauung*, but who is unaware of having a *Weltanschauung*, and who believes he is dealing with the world as it is, independently of any *Welt-anschauung*” (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 8-9)²⁵. This man and his world image, which is supposed to immediately reveal reality, are called “naïve” (in the terms of *Identity and Reality*, they are at the stage of “naïve positivism”), as opposed to the “reflected image” (*image réfléchie*) of the “scientific” or “knowledgeable” man (*savant*), which presupposes “awareness of the *image*” and, thus, of the “possibility of error” (*conscience de l’image, possibilité de l’erreur*). If, however, the (conscious) search for *truth* prompted by image awareness is common to all “scientific men”, Kojève distinguishes three types among them: the scientist in the strict sense or natural scientist, the human scientist or historian, and the philosopher. While the scientist is only concerned with the world, that is, with the true image, disregarding false images, and the historian is interested only in truthfully *describing* given images without examining their truth *value*, the philosopher is a kind of synthesis of the other two, in that, “while searching for the true image, he does not neglect the false ones and studies them as *images* and *false images*” (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 4)²⁶. Kojève’s example is Socrates – “the first genuine *philosopher*” –, whose “*dialectical method*,” contrary to that of the pre-Socratic “savants”, only conceived truth as the result of comparing “different *images*” or “different *errors*”²⁷. This attitude, Kojève says, is foundational to all later philosophy up to our time: “In principle, the *savant* may not know the history of his science; the philosopher must know the history of philosophy. [...] The philosopher must criticize *other* philosophers, and it is above all through this critique that he justifies himself” (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 4).²⁸

Philosophy thus defined, in turn, is composed of three steps. The first is called “Phenomenology” by Kojève and consists of a description of *Weltanschauungen*. Phenomenology differs from historical inquiry

²³ “Pour me conformer à ce titre je n’aurais dû parler *que* de la pensée *religieuse* – ou, si vous voulez, *anti-religieuse* – de Bayle. [...] Par le choix du titre j’ai seulement voulu souligner que le centre de gravité et l’origine de cette pensée se trouvent dans la critique de la religion”.

²⁴ “si la pensée de Bayle présente un intérêt *pour* un philosophe, elle n’est pas *elle-même* une pensée *philosophique* au sens propre du mot. Autrement dit, je voudrais essayer de donner une *interprétation* philosophique d’une pensée *non* philosophique. Ou, plus exactement, d’une pensée qui n’a d’intérêt véritable que [...] par ses *éléments* non-philosophiques, ses éléments proprement philosophiques étant – à mon avis – dénués de valeur, en raison du manque de profondeur, d’originalité et... de *vérité*”.

²⁵ “c’est-à-dire une image qui implique l’ensemble du monde naturel *et* culturel, historique, y compris l’homme qui a cette *Weltanschauung*, mais qui ne se rend pas compte du fait d’avoir une *Weltanschauung*, et qui croit avoir affaire au monde, tel qu’il est indépendamment de toute *Welt-anschauung*”.

²⁶ “la philosophie, tout en recherchant l’image vraie, ne néglige pas les fausses et les étudie en tant qu’*images* et *images fausses*”.

²⁷ “Socrate – le premier *philosophe* véritable – se servait de la méthode *dialectique*, c’est-à-dire il cherchait la vérité de et par une *confrontation* des opinions, c’est-à-dire des différentes *images* de la réalité, des différentes *erreurs*”.

²⁸ “En principe, le *savant* peut ne pas connaître l’histoire de sa science; le philosophe doit connaître l’histoire de la philosophie. [...] Le philosophe doit critiquer les *autres* philosophes, et c’est surtout par cette critique qu’il se justifie”.

not only in its purpose – finding the *true* world image – but, correspondingly, also in its procedure. For, on the one hand, it does not merely analyze the images actually produced in history but aims at establishing a – virtually complete – list of *possible* images; on the other hand, and more importantly, it does not merely describe them *as they were produced*, but seeks to reduce them to their ideal “purity”:

[The historian] is content to *reproduce* the image as it was conceived by its author. The philosopher considers it as a *possible* image, and takes from the real image only that which corresponds to the possible image. In other words, he will not only *complete* the historical series of images but also *improve* each member of this series. [...] To this end, he will *first complete* the image in question, *developing* all that it implies, highlighting whatever its author may not have seen. *Then*, he will *purify* the actual image by *eliminating* everything that – in fact – is part of *another* possible image. Actually produced images are usually *hybrid*, made of a combination of ideas borrowed from *different* possible images. The phenomenologist will try to establish the *pure* possible types. In this sense, it can be said that the phenomenologist understands the produced image better than its author. (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 6)²⁹

It is not difficult to recognize in this procedure – termed here “phenomenological” presumably because of its resemblance to Husserl’s “eidetic variation” – the peculiar method used by Kojève himself in *Identity and Reality* – attempting, as we have seen, to reproduce “the ‘reasonings’, conscious or not”, that lead Bayle to use his concepts “in the way he does, or – maybe – in the way he should have”, so as to understand his image “better than its author”. Indeed, here as well, Kojève says that the main purpose of his course is to analyze Bayle’s own *Weltanschauung* “as phenomenologists” (*en phénoménologues*: KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 13).

Phenomenology as an eidetic analysis of *Weltanschauungen* is preliminary to the two further philosophical steps, which Kojève calls “Philosophy in the strict sense” and “Metaphysics” or “Ontology”. The former aims at finding the true image of the world, but – unlike natural science – of a world conceived in such a way as to include the existence of its own images, true and false. The “specifically philosophical question” is thus: “What must the real world be like, so that within it all the images that men have formed of it can be formed, *including* the *true* image formed by the philosopher who asks himself this whole question?” (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 7).³⁰ Finally, the metaphysical or ontological question concerns “Being as such” and can be formulated as follows: “What is Being, which realizes itself in the world involving man and revealing itself to him in and through the images he forms of it, especially the image that is *true* and established as true by philosophy?” (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 8).³¹ While, according to Kojève, the goal of every genuine philosophy is to “culminate into an ontology”, he also claims that this goal is very rarely achieved, for “only the greatest philosophers have made contributions in the ontological realm” (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 8).³²

In Bayle’s case, however, neither of the last two philosophical steps is of particular relevance for Kojève. While, in his view, Bayle seems to have “not even suspected the existence” of the ontological question, his

²⁹ “[L’historien] se contente de *reproduire* l’image telle qu’elle a été conçue par son auteur. Le philosophe la considérera comme une image *possible*, et il ne prendra de l’image réelle que ce qui correspond à l’image possible. C’est-à-dire, il va non pas seulement *compléter* la série historique des images, mais encore *améliorer* chacun des membres de cette série. [...] À cette fin, il va *d’abord compléter* l’image en question, en *développant* tout ce qu’elle implique, en mettant en évidence tout ce que son auteur peut ne pas avoir vu. *Ensuite*, il va *épurer* l’image réelle en *éliminant* tout ce qui – en fait – fait partie d’une *autre* image possible. Les images réellement émises sont généralement *hybrides*, faites d’une combinaison d’idées empruntées à *différentes* images possibles. Le phénoménologue essaiera d’établir les types possibles *purs*. Et on peut dire en ce sens que le phénoménologue comprend l’image émise mieux que son auteur”.

³⁰ “la question spécifiquement philosophique est celle-ci: quel doit être le monde réel pour qu’à l’intérieur de lui puissent se former toutes les images que les hommes se sont faites de lui, *y compris* l’image *vraie* que se fait le philosophe qui se pose toute cette question”.

³¹ “La question ontologique est donc: qu’est-ce que l’Être, qui se réalise dans le monde qui implique l’homme et se révèle à lui dans et par les images qu’il s’en fait, notamment dans et par l’image *vraie* et établie comme vraie par la philosophie”.

³² “seul les très grands philosophes ont apporté des contributions dans le domaine ontologique”.

properly *philosophical* theories – such as that of the animated atoms – appear to Kojève, as anticipated, either irrelevant or unoriginal or even fragmentary and distorted simplifications of others' doctrines, so that, "if one wants to study the history of the *second* philosophical step in the 17th century, one must refer to these authors and can completely disregard Bayle" (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 10).³³ In contrast, for Kojève, Bayle's *phenomenological* contribution to the history of philosophy is not only discernible but eminent, since Bayle "was the *first* to *consciously* attempt" a phenomenological list of *Weltanschauungen*, although an obviously incomplete one and despite the existence of "precursors" such as Aristotle and Francis Bacon (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 10).³⁴ This contribution is "phenomenological" in the strict limits of the term defined above, that is, more than mere historical description and less than "philosophy" in the sense of the second step. On one side, Bayle analyzes and compares different *Weltanschauungen* – Protestant and Catholic, Christian and secular, as well as opposing philosophical doctrines – by attempting to reduce them to their essential or ideal content; on the other side, he considers their ideality merely as such, i.e., in its immanent structure and implications, without posing the question of its truth. In Kojève's words: "We can say [...] that Bayle studies and confronts *Weltanschauungen* as *essential possibilities* for understanding the world and for the existential attitude determined by this understanding. And, in so doing, he – undoubtedly – works as a *phenomenologist*" – which, despite any inadequacies in his individual analyses, "is enough to rank him among the *philosophers*" (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 11-12).³⁵ If, nevertheless, Bayle's overall thought has a philosophical "significance" without genuinely being "the thought of a *philosopher*" (*la pensée d'un philosophe*), this is due to the "naïveté" that prevented him from becoming aware of, and consequently discussing, *his own* *Weltanschauung* (something that, however, as Kojève points out, is shared to some extent by *all* philosophers, so that one should actually speak of "degrees of naïveté"). About this *Weltanschauung*, therefore, one must "be less naïve, that is, more of a philosopher or phenomenologist, than he himself was", thus doing "with Bayle what he did with others in his phenomenological analyses" (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 13-14).³⁶

Here, though, Kojève may appear to somehow contradict himself. For, while acknowledging Bayle's phenomenological analyses of *Weltanschauungen* as his most valuable philosophical contribution, he also claims that the main topic of the course will not consist of these analyses, but precisely of "Bayle's own *Weltanschauung*, which is implied in everything he says" as his tacit "basis and starting point" (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 14, 12).³⁷ This inarticulate substratum of Bayle's thought – as distinct from his (negligible) philosophical doctrines – is thus, for Kojève, both the reason for its having a *mere* philosophical "significance" and the true source of this significance. It is the most "naïve" and "the most interesting aspect in him, in his thought" (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 14).³⁸ How can that be?

The answer is given by Kojève indirectly by addressing another question, that of the very choice of Bayle as an object of study. It is here, at the end of his three introductory lectures, that he indicates the two motives of interest in Bayle quoted above, "philosophical" and "contingent". We examined the contingent motive in the first section. The explanation of the philosophical motive is the acme of Kojève's analysis and by far the most explicit clue to his interpretation of Bayle as a whole:

³³ "Si l'on veut étudier l'histoire de la *deuxième* étape philosophique au XVII^e siècle, c'est à ces auteurs qu'il faut se rapporter, et on peut complètement négliger Bayle".

³⁴ "Bayle était le *premier* à tenter *consciemment* d'établir une telle liste de la Phénoménologie".

³⁵ "On peut [...] dire que Bayle étudie et confronte des *Weltanschauungen* en tant que *possibilités essentielles* de la compréhension du monde et de l'attitude existentielle déterminée par cette compréhension. Et, en le faisant, il fait – sans nul doute – œuvre d'un *phénoménologue* [...] et ceci suffit pour le ranger parmi les *philosophes*".

³⁶ "être moins naïf, c'est-à-dire plus philosophe ou phénoménologue, qu'il n'a été lui-même [...] faire pour Bayle ce qu'il a fait pour d'autres dans ses analyses phénoménologiques".

³⁷ "la *Weltanschauung* de Bayle lui-même, qui est impliquée dans tout ce qu'il dit", "qui lui servait de base et de point de départ".

³⁸ "la *Weltanschauung* de Bayle est, vraiment, ce qu'il y a de plus intéressant en lui, en sa pensée".

Bayle's Weltanschauung belongs to the *hybrid* type. In other words, it is full of contradictions, arising from the fact that Bayle, who lives at a turning point in history, participates – without being aware of it – in different, even opposing, historical worlds. Now, it is when we see several Weltanschauungen coexist, or, rather, contradict each other, i.e., tend to exclude each other in the thought of a *single* man, that we are best able to discover the essential character of each of them. This, I believe, is the reason why, when we study a cultural phenomenon, we go back to its origins, we study it *in statu nascendi* – among its first followers, a new Weltanschauung is always mixed with those it is destined to replace; and it is this paradoxical coexistence that shows the truly new in the new and the essential in the old.

From this point of view, the study of Bayle is particularly instructive, perhaps more so than the study of thinkers who – in themselves – are more important than him. (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 15-16)³⁹

Kojève then anticipates “a simple scheme” of Bayle’s contradictions, to be developed in the rest of the course:

There are, I believe, two essentially different ways of understanding man. *For one*, the individual is attached in a *direct, immediate* way to values – theoretical or “moral” – which subsist independently of the existence of the individual, of humanity, of the empirical world in which men live; and this immediate, essentially contemplative, inactive contact is the properly *human* content of the life of the individual, who, consequently, can and must disregard all empirical conditions – natural or historical – of his existence. *In the other* view (which I take in its *radical* form), these values transcending the empirical world do not exist; the life of the individual is limited to his relations with nature and other men; and – these relations being necessarily *active* – it is *action*, and not contemplation, that constitutes the *human* content of the individual existence – technical action towards nature and moral, political action towards other men. (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 16)⁴⁰

The “hybrid” character of Bayle’s “Weltanschauung”, therefore, consists of a peculiar mixture of these two basic anthropological views:

Clearly, these two views are mutually exclusive. And yet, both coexist – while contradicting each other – in Bayle’s thought.

Furthermore, this fundamental opposition is complicated in him by another, secondary one.

I am referring to the opposition within the *first* conception of man, i.e., that which is known as the opposition between “faith” and “reason”. Some assert that immediate contact with transcendent values can only be realized in the individual in the form of “faith”; others believe that this contact has an essentially *rational* character, taking place in and through “reason”. And, here again, Bayle’s thought participates in *both* opposing points of view.

Now, while generally accepted, this opposition of “faith” and “reason” is nothing less than clear. And I believe that the study of Bayle’s thought is particularly apt to help us understand what we are dealing with here.

(I would say incidentally that the *second* conception of man also implies an opposition, parallel to the one I have just mentioned. I would like to call it the opposition between the ideal of *conformist* active life and that of revolutionary action. I do not insist on this opposition because, in my opinion, it is not to be found as an opposition in Bayle’s own thought, which represents a relatively very pure type of *conformism*. But the study of

³⁹ “La Weltanschauung de Bayle appartient au type *hybride*. Autrement dit, elle est pleine de contradictions, qui proviennent du fait que Bayle, vivant à un tournant de l’histoire, participe – sans s’en rendre compte – à plusieurs mondes historiques différents, voire opposés l’un à l’autre. Or, c’est lorsqu’on voit plusieurs Weltanschauungen coexister, ou, plutôt, se contredire, c’est-à-dire tendre à s’exclure dans la pensée d’un *seul* homme, que l’on arrive le mieux à découvrir le caractère essentiel de chacune d’elles. C’est, je crois, là la raison pour laquelle, lorsqu’on étudie un phénomène culturel, on remonte à ses origines, on l’étudie *in statu nascendi*: chez les premiers adeptes d’une nouvelle Weltanschauung, elle est toujours mêlée avec celles qu’elle est appelée à remplacer; et c’est cette coexistence paradoxale qui fait voir le vraiment nouveau dans le nouveau et l’essentiel dans l’ancien.

Or, de ce point de vue, l’étude de Bayle est particulièrement instructive, plus peut-être que l’étude de penseurs qui – pris en eux-mêmes – sont plus importants que lui”.

⁴⁰ “Il y a, je crois, deux manières essentiellement différentes de comprendre l’homme. *Pour les uns*, l’individu est rattaché d’une manière *directe, immédiate* à des valeurs – théoriques ou ‘morales’ – qui subsistent indépendamment de l’existence de l’individu, de l’humanité, du monde empirique où vivent les hommes; et ce contact immédiat, essentiellement contemplatif, inactif, est le contenu proprement *humain* de la vie de l’individu, qui, par conséquent, peut et doit se désintéresser de toutes les conditions empiriques – naturelles ou historiques – de son existence. *Dans l’autre* manière de voir (que je prends dans sa forme *radicale*), ces valeurs transcendantes par rapport au monde empirique n’existent pas; la vie de l’individu se limite à ses rapports avec la nature et les autres hommes; et – ces rapports étant nécessairement *actifs* – c’est l’*action*, et non la contemplation, qui constitue le contenu *humain* de l’existence individuelle, – l’action technique vis-à-vis de la nature et l’action morale, politique vis-à-vis des autres hommes”.

Bayle's existential attitude – and his thought – can nevertheless contribute to the understanding of conformism and – consequently – of its opposite.) (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 17-18)⁴¹

Kojève then concludes by locating Bayle's contradictions within his own Hegelian philosophy of history:

The fundamental opposition I have mentioned can also be presented in the form of the well-known opposition between ancient, pagan anthropology and Judeo-Christian or modern anthropology. I will often have to discuss this fundamental opposition when commenting on the texts we will be reading. For now, I shall simply mention that the study of Bayle can – also – contribute to the solution of a crucial problem, which is – I believe – *the problem of the [present?] critique of religion*. This problem can be formulated as follows: does the abandonment of *religious* Christianity necessarily mean a relapse into paganism? Is it not possible to *overcome religious* Christianity, by retaining Christian *anthropology* – which, more or less consciously, we all accept – and abandoning Christian *theology*, which involves so many – at first sight at least – insurmountable difficulties, on which Bayle insisted so much?

These are the – if you like – “philosophical” reasons for studying Bayle's thought (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 18).⁴²

III.2. Hybrid modernities

The passage, quoted in the first section, on the “contingent” reason (*la raison d'actualité*) to study Bayle follows immediately thereafter. Taken together, these statements shed new light not only on Kojève's concern with Bayle's “Weltanschauung”, but also on the relationship between the “philosophical” and “contingent” reasons themselves and, therefore, on Bayle's overall significance for him. As for the first point, Bayle's worldview is revealing to Kojève precisely as a “hybrid” one – as the “paradoxical coexistence”, or, more specifically, *historical transition*, between the “two essentially different ways of understanding man”. Indeed, although Kojève ascribes the contemplative and active anthropologies to antiquity and Christianity, respectively, his mention of Bayle's “turning point in history” at the crossroads of “different, even opposing, historical worlds” leaves no doubt that he is referring to the transition from *premodernity* to *modernity*. In this sense, Christian anthropology seems to oppose the ancient one as a “world image” that is *fully* realized – in a paradoxically secularized form – only in modern times. Apparently, then, the two views rather correspond to what Kojève calls “feudal” and “commercial” ideologies in his notes on

⁴¹ “Visiblement, ces deux façons de voir s'excluent l'une l'autre. Et néanmoins, les deux coexistent – tout en se contredisant – dans la pensée de Bayle.

En plus, cette opposition fondamentale se complique, chez lui, d'une autre, – secondaire.

J'ai en vue l'opposition à l'intérieur de la *première* conception de l'homme, c'est-à-dire l'opposition connue sous le nom de l'opposition entre la ‘foi’ et la ‘raison’: les uns affirment que le contact immédiat avec les valeurs transcendantes ne peut se réaliser dans l'individu que sous la forme de la ‘foi’; les autres pensent que ce contact a un caractère essentiellement *rationnel*, s'effectuant dans et par la ‘raison’. Et, ici encore, la pensée de Bayle participe aux *deux* points de vue opposés.

Or, tout en étant généralement admise, cette opposition de la ‘foi’ et de la ‘raison’ n'est rien moins que claire. Et je crois que l'étude de la pensée de Bayle est particulièrement apte à nous aider à comprendre de quoi il s'agit ici.

(Je dirais entre parenthèses que la *deuxième* conception de l'homme implique aussi une opposition, parallèle à celle que je viens de signaler. Je voudrais l'appeler l'opposition entre l'idéal de la vie active *conformiste* et l'idéal de l'action révolutionnaire. Je n'insiste pas sur cette opposition parce que, à mon avis, elle ne se trouve pas en tant qu'opposition dans la pensée de Bayle lui-même, qui représente un type relativement très pur de *conformisme*. Mais l'étude de l'attitude existentielle de Bayle – et de sa pensée – peut néanmoins contribuer à la compréhension du conformisme et – par suite – de son opposé.)”

⁴² “L'opposition fondamentale dont j'ai parlé peut aussi être présentée sous la forme de l'opposition bien connue entre l'anthropologie antique, païenne, et l'anthropologie judéo-chrétienne ou moderne. J'aurai souvent à parler de cette opposition fondamentale en commentant les textes que nous lisons. Pour le moment je me contente de mentionner que l'étude de Bayle peut – aussi – contribuer à la solution d'un problème capital, qui est – je crois – *le problème de la critique [actuelle?] de la religion*. Ce problème peut être formulé comme suit: l'abandon du christianisme *religieux* signifie-t-il nécessairement une rechute dans le paganisme? Ne peut-on pas *dépasser* le christianisme *religieux*, en conservant l'*anthropologie* chrétienne – que, plus ou moins consciemment, nous acceptons tous – [et] en abandonnant la *théologie* chrétienne, qui implique tant de difficultés – à première vue du moins – insurmontables, – difficultés sur lesquelles a tant insisté Bayle?

Telles sont les raisons – si vous voulez ‘philosophiques’ – qui justifient l'étude de la pensée de Bayle.”

Bayle and Fontenelle, so that, after all, the subject of his lectures is indeed what he retrospectively stated at the Düsseldorf conference – “Pierre Bayle and the Origins of Liberalism”, that is, of the modern world.

And yet, Bayle’s significance in this historical constellation is not limited to what Kojève says here about the epistemic – “eidetic” – advantage of examining a worldview “in statu nascendi”. For, as shown again by Kojève’s notes on Bayle and Fontenelle, not only Bayle, but *modernity itself* is, in a sense, “hybrid”. Since, for Kojève, our world has never fully moved beyond its own “status nascendi”, Bayle appears as not only its embryo but also its most representative expression. This is confirmed by a last passage at the very end of the manuscript, namely the concluding remarks to Kojève’s twenty-sixth lecture of May 24, 1937.⁴³ Like the entire manuscript from the fourth lecture onward, these remarks are in the form of shorthand comments sometimes difficult to decipher, but they seem to be roughly translatable as follows. Bayle’s “value” includes both his “historical importance” and his “value to us”. Historically, Bayle has been of enormous relevance, but only through his *criticism*, that is, without contributing anything positive or new and remaining largely unknown. Bayle’s criticism was directed against prejudices in the *Pensées diverses sur la comète*, intolerance in the *Commentaire philosophique*, and theology and metaphysics in the *Dictionnaire*. All this resulted in the birth of *anthropology* but, further still, in “an (unconscious) influence on the liberal democratic ideal” (or perhaps: “idealism”). Bayle’s value to *us* is determined accordingly. His critique gives us nothing *new* except a “Phenomenology” as an explanation of man. There is, therefore, nothing to *learn* from him, but much to *understand* about “history and ourselves as historical” – for Bayle is the “ideal origin” (or: “the origin of the idealism”) of the “world in which we live”. Specifically, Bayle allows us to “understand the liberal democratic ideal” (or: “idealism”), which falls (?) on tolerance and the difference between Faith and Reason. We accepted “Bayle” (the inverted commas are Kojève’s) without further discussion. Now, “Bayle” is very “special”. For him, Faith is Faith in God, that is, in something transcendent. Under this condition, tolerance and the difference between Faith and Reason are possible. But if Faith is Faith in Man, that is, in something immanent, then clearly they are not possible. In general, Bayle falls (?) on *rationalist irrationalism*, that is, he opens to history and the collective dimension of the “research team”, but maintains the rationalist ideal of one and transcendent truth. This allows for “criticism, pacifism, verbalism, tolerance”. If, however, truth does not *exist* but *creates* itself, then “Bayle does not work”. Above all, truth then becomes a *moral*, i.e., anthropological one, or, in other words, the realization of Bayle’s own ideal of the “wise man”, “which is also the ideal of *any* philosophical truth” (KOJÈVE, 1936-1937, p. 88).⁴⁴

⁴³ In the manuscript, lectures 4-26 have the following structure: Bayle’s biography (4-8); analysis of the *Pensées diverses* (9-12), the *Commentaire philosophique* (13-16), and the *Continuation des Pensées diverses* (17-18); interpretation of the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (biblical criticism, 19; critique of the theological proofs of God’s existence and the dogma of creation, 20; Providence, 21-22; Faith and Reason, 23; dogmatic philosophy: Spinoza, 24; Eleatics and Pyrrhonists, 25); conclusions (26).

⁴⁴ “II. Valeur.

A. Importance historique.

Influence énorme, mais par *critique*. – Rien de positif (nouveau). [...] Inconnu.

Critique qui agit: a) contre ‘préj[ugés]’ (*Pensées diverses sur la comète*); b) contre intolérance (*Commentaire philosophique*); c) contre théologie/métaphysique (*Dictionnaire*).

Ceci aboutit à *Anthropologie*. [...] Mais plus loin encore. Influence (inconsciente) sur l’idéal. libér[al]/démocr[atique].

[...] B. Valeur pour nous. [...]

Critique – ne nous donne rien de nouveau. ‘Phénoménologie’ (explication de l’homme) – [...]. Bref – rien à *apprendre*. Mais – très important pour *comprendre*: l’histoire, et nous-mêmes, en tant qu’historiques. Car: Bayle = origine idéal. du monde où nous vivons. [...] Notamment: compréhension de l’idéal. lib[éral]-dém[ocratique], [symbol that perhaps means: falls] sur tolérance/F[oi] ≠ R[aïson]. – On a accepté ‘Bayle’, et puis plus discuté. Or, ‘Bayle’ est très ‘spécial’. Pour lui: F[oi] = F[oi] en D[ieu] (c’est-à-dire [symbol that seems to mean: transcendent]). Là, tol[érance], F[oi] ≠ R[aïson] possible. Mais si F[oi] en H[omme] (c’est-à-dire [symbol that seems to mean: immanent])?! Évidemment – non. – En général: ‘Bayle’ [symbol that perhaps means: falls] sur *irrationalisme rationaliste*. C’est-à-dire: *histoire/équipe*, mais idéal *rationaliste*, c’est-à-dire ‘vérité’ [symbols that seem to mean: one and transcendent]: Là = critique/pacif[isme]/verb[alisme]/tolérance possible. Mais si vérité n’est pas, mais se *crée*?! Alors, Bayle ne va pas. – Surtout [...] vérité *morale*, c’est-à-dire anthropologique, c’est-à-dire réalisation de son propre idéal de ‘h[omme] savant’, qui est aussi l’idéal de *toute* vérité philosophique”.

The actual issue at stake in Kojève's reading of Bayle, therefore, is the "liberal democratic ideal" (or: "idealism") that modernity inherited from Bayle "unconsciously" and "without further discussion". This ideal, and with it "the world in which we live", is for Kojève still as *mixed* as its original source – that is, structurally trapped between an "irrationalist" (active, immanent, historical-empirical) impulse and a "rationalist" (contemplative, transcendent, dogmatic) remnant. In its liberal democratic consensus, then, *modernity is still infused with premodernity* – "Bayle" is but the name for this secret. And, as shown at length in *Identity and Reality*, the output of such short-circuit is the "purely literary chatter" of "second skepticism" with its quietist (and disintegrating) political effects. From today's perspective, then, Kojève's overall point about Bayle might also be summarized in another way – "*postmodernity*" is *actually premodern*. In tracing the matrix of modernity, Kojève ultimately intends to oppose its fate by prompting it to become what it is, i.e., consistently *modern*, surrendering once and for all to an integrally *human* idea of truth – such as Hegel's and Marx's – that conflates "essence" and "phenomenon" into *self-creation* and is capable, therefore, of dispensing with both relativism and a political attitude limited to "critique, pacifism, verbalism, tolerance". For he appears to believe that, in the crisis of his time, Bayle "does not work" anymore – which brings us directly to our second and last point.

After World War II, as a French state diplomat, Kojève ironically called himself a "right-wing Marxist" (*un marxiste de droite*: AUFFRET, 1990, p. 304). This joke provides a better understanding of Kojève's quite serious words on the eve of the war in defense of an allegedly "Baylean" position on contemporary politics. Indeed, at first glance, the "philosophical" and "contingent" reasons he states for his interest in Bayle blatantly contradict each other, insofar as, while criticizing Bayle's "hybrid" philosophical skepticism, he seems to defend the political tolerance toward ideological conflicts that such skepticism was supposed to ground. This contradiction, however, is merely apparent, since the practical attitude he derives from Bayle is precisely *not* "tolerant" in the sense of political pluralism and only to be achieved today on *non-Baylean* theoretical premises. If, as Kojève says in his notes on Bayle and Fontenelle, the relativism of the Republic of Letters was "extended" to the state after Bayle, then his radical means of restoring the state's immunity – already asserted by Bayle – to that relativism is to defeat it – against him – *within* the Republic of Letters itself: "a scientifically based fusion of the Republic of Letters and the state aimed at the *creation* of human truth". When praising Bayle in his letter to Strauss for understanding "the motives and the meaning of the middle position" better than "modern democrats", Kojève almost certainly intends that, unlike the latter, Bayle was still clear about how much epistemic tolerance rests on undiminished state authority. But his own advocacy of the "middle position" dispenses with tolerance altogether: that is, it does not follow from *neutral* indifference towards communism and fascism, but from a very engaged *third* standpoint that ultimately coincides with that of the existing state. Much more than classical liberalism, then, Kojève's theoretical strategy closely recalls that advanced by Schmitt in the previous decade for the Weimar Republic, namely sacrificing the pluralist premises of liberal democracy to save the liberal democratic constitution by cutting off the extremes (SCHMITT, 2004). Its notable difference from Schmitt – and Bayle – is that Kojève's centrist statolatry, in turn, does not rely on the *fact* of the constitution in a decisionist sense, but on the Right-Hegelian identification of the modern state with embodied rationality. Both rival ideologies are seen as still contemplative "theories" in the terms of *Identity and Reality*, to be "actively and violently" suppressed by a Hegelian "universal state" finally acknowledged as the truth itself.

One can attempt, though, to subject Kojève to his own criterion. If his "phenomenological" intent was to scrutinize Bayle in the same way that Bayle had scrutinized other philosophers, it might be wondered, in a third reflexive movement, whether Kojève's own "Weltanschauung" does not also have something "hybrid" about it. In Kojève, the professed Marxism and the struggle against (Western) communism can nonchalantly coexist because "Marx" is constantly conceived by him as in essential continuity with Hegel, so that his "right-wing Marxism" is actually, as just suggested, a variant of the *Hegelian* Right. The postulate of the latter is precisely the attribution of eminent subjectivity to the state. However, in light

of the historical-materialist turn accomplished by the young Marx between the *Jewish Question* and the *Theses on Feuerbach*, political sovereignty appears *transcendent* to the social immanence of relations of production as the real core of human agency. From a left-wing perspective, therefore, the point is not to oppose class struggle to Kojève as an external objection, but to assess the possibility of criticizing him *immanently* in a twofold sense of the word. In a time like ours, when the “second-skeptical” disorientation of liberal politics is increasingly challenged by pleas for strong states, one might try to reverse these terms by posing to Kojève the same problem he posed about “Christian anthropology” – is it possible to *retain* his critique of weak epistemology while *overcoming* its authoritarian consequences? If successful, such a strategy would amount to no less than vindicating the modern against the premodern Kojève.

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