



Isabel Jacobs
(PhD, Queen Mary University of London)

28 April 2026 | 6.30 p.m.
N.1.71 (Department of Philosophy)

Thinking in Circles: Kojève reading Hegel with Heraclitus

The guest lecture by Isabel Jacobs is dedicated to one of the most infamous readers of Hegel in the twentieth century, the Russian-French philosopher Alexandre Kojève, and is organised by the Department of Philosophy.

Rather than a bad reading of Hegel, Jacobs follows Kojève in reintroducing his philosophy as an update (*mise à jour*) of Hegel for his own time, a project that he thought was impossible to finish. Jacobs explains what this update of Hegel looked like – Kojève called it his “system of knowledge” – by looking beyond the famous Hegel lectures and towards his “minor” texts, including a monumental 3-volume introduction to pagan philosophy, his study of Kant and his early books on physics. Throughout his writings, as well as his diagrams and photographs some of which Jacobs will show, Kojève claimed he merely tried to repeat the entire Hegelian system but only one time – a closed circle drawn in a single stroke of the hand.

Throughout his life, Kojève was obsessed with the symbol of the circle, jotting down dozens of diagrams of circles which he attributed to different philosophers (“Kant”, for example, was a dotted circle, “Heraclitus” a spiral; “Hegel” a perfectly closed circumference – but only thanks to the last pencil stroke by “Kojève”). In his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, Kojève claimed that Hegel's system was both circular and only virtually closed, a tension that reappears in his late work on Heraclitus.

There, Kojève contrasts post-Hegelian silence with the “infinite gossip” of Heraclitus, gesturing toward an open temporality that unsettles totality and, ultimately, his famous concept of the end of history (which was conceptualised less as an end of events than a figure of circularity and the exhaustion of philosophical possibilities).

Isabel Jacobs (PhD, Queen Mary University of London) is a philosopher and writer based in London and Prague. She is a Research Scholar at the Northwestern University Research Initiative in Russian Philosophy, Literature, and Religious Thought, and a Fellow at the Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences.

She has published on Soviet and continental philosophy and film and is currently writing a book on Alexandre Kojève's aesthetics, working with his unfinished manuscripts, diagrams and photographs. Her co-edited volume *Authority, History, and Political Theology* (with archival material on Kojève and the Jesuits) is coming out with Bloomsbury this summer.



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