Eric Voegelin and Alexandre Kojève were close contemporaries. Voegelin was born in 1901 in Cologne; Kojève was born in 1902 in Moscow. Their relations, however, were remote. Voegelin likely first learned of Kojève from Leo Strauss who mentioned him in a letter to Voegelin (15 April, 1949); a little over a year later, Strauss praised Kojève's book on Hegel as "in every detail an outstanding interpretation of the Phenomenology of Spirit." [1] A few years later Voegelin wrote to Richard C. Cornuelle of the William Volker Fund, which had supported Voegelin's own work, regarding potential European participants in summer conferences supported by the Fund. He warmly recommended Eric Weil (who was much less favourably viewed by Strauss and Kojève) and added: "The other two neo-Hegelians, Alexandre Kojève and Jean Hyppolite, unfortunately I do not know personally" so he could not attest to their English-speaking ability. He also doubted "that Kojève, who has an important position in the Ministry of Economics, would be available." [2] What Voegelin knew of Kojève, he knew through his writing.[3]

Kojève's interpretation of Hegel began in 1933 when he took over a seminar on Hegel's philosophy of religion that his friend Alexandre Koyré, another Russian émigré, had been teaching at the Ecole pratique des hautes Etudes.[4] Koyré had focussed his seminar on Hegel's "Early Theological Writings" or so-called "Jena Manuscripts." Kojève's seminar was on Hegel's Phenomenology. It continued over the next six years when he ended his commentary on "The Post-historical Attitude," which he found in Hegel's concluding chapter. Over the years, Kojève attracted a brilliant and varied audience, which included Georges Bataille, Henri Corbin, Raymond Queneau, Gaston Fessard, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Raymond Aron, Jacques Lacan, Raymond Polin, and Jean Desanti, many of whom became major figures in the intellectual world of postwar Paris.[5]

Shortly after finishing his commentary on Hegel, Kojève was drafted into the French army but apparently did not see combat. He may have been involved with the maquis in the south of France; other reports indicate he had been a KGB recruit since the late 1930s.[6] Whatever his murky role in clandestine political activities, after the war Kojève joined the French Ministry of Economic Affairs as an assistant to one of his auditors from the 1930s, Robert Marjolin, who had been an economic advisor to General Charles de
Gaulle during the war and later became an important *haut fonctionnaire* in the French civil service. His initial postwar responsibilities included administering the Marshall Plan in France. Marjolin and Kojève were also instrumental in the creation of the Organization for European Economic Cooperation which later became the OECD. Kojève was the chief architect of the "Kennedy Round" of the GATT in 1964 and a major participant in French negotiations establishing the European Economic Community. As Voegelin said to Cornuelle, he was an important (and evidently very busy) bureaucrat.

The most obvious thing about the relationship of Voegelin and Kojève, therefore, is that they were strangers. About the only obvious connection is that Kojève and Voegelin both discussed Strauss' commentary on Xenophon's dialogue *Hiero*. Strauss corresponded with both Voegelin and Kojève, respectively, asking them for help in getting *On Tyranny* published and requesting a review of it. Not surprisingly, Voegelin was of no help, though both wrote reviews, to which Strauss replied with a "Restatement." This initial, and indirect, encounter took place in a leisurely fashion between 1946 and 1954. Unfortunately, there is no record, so far as I know, of Voegelin's response either to Strauss' "Restatement" or to Kojève's discussion of *On Tyranny*.

Fascinating as these philological issues are, I have been asked to discuss what Voegelin made of Kojève's interpretation of Hegel. The short answer is given in my title: Kojève provided the decrypt to Hegel's encoded argument. Kojève's lectures on the *Phenomenology* included remarks on Hegel's other works, and Voegelin applied them to other texts of Hegel. But of course matters were more complex than that. I noted above that Voegelin saw Kojève as a "neo-Hegelian." Voegelin has himself been described as a "descendant" or a "dialectical twin" of Hegel. Accordingly, it might be useful to begin with a sketch of Voegelin's changing understanding of Hegel. In his dissertation, "Interaction and Spiritual Community" (1922), Voegelin rejected Hegel's notion of "the continuous progressive evolution from the beginning of world history to the present day" but he did so without providing an extensive argument. A few years later in his first book, *On the Form of the American Mind* (1928), Voegelin noted: "in contrast to projects such as Hegel's, in which the dialectic was made the core problem of philosophic thought, the efforts of Peirce and James sought to avoid dialectics and eliminate its various manifestations from philosophy." By this reading, Hegelian philosophy was simply a variation on philosophy, of which William James provided an equally possible variation. In his 1930 lecture on "National Types of Mind," he provided a neutral summary of Hegel's "broad understanding of history." In 1936 he noted that Hegel's philosophy "bears the trait of Averroism." Nevertheless, Voegelin used the Hegelian term "objective spirit" in an approximately Hegelian
fashion and praised Hegel's analysis of the English Reform Bill of 1831. The *History of Political Ideas*, written during the decade after 1939, routinely compared Hegel to other figures in the history of Western political thought. By 1954, Voegelin noted that although Hegel was a gnostic thinker, he still had great intellectual appeal; and even as late as 1965, Hegel was simply a "great thinker." For most of his intellectual life Voegelin seemed to be ambivalent about Hegel. It was not until his 1971 essay "On Hegel: A Study in Sorcery" that he was able to sort out the various dimensions of Hegelian speculation in a satisfactory way. In his reply to Altizer's view that he was a "descendant" of Hegel, Voegelin acknowledged that his mature understanding of Hegel "was stimulated and materially supported" by Kojève's *Introduction*.

Voegelin was very much aware of his own relationship to Hegel. As he said to the editor of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Ray L. Hart, who invited his response to Altizer's remarks quoted above:

There is a story to my relation to Hegel: For a long time I studiously avoided any serious criticism of Hegel in my published work, because I simply could not understand him. I knew that something was wrong, but I did not know what. There was a thinker whom I admired for the political acumen of his study on the English Reform Bill of 1831, and for his qualities as a German man of letters which he displayed in his essay-review of Hamann's *Schriften* (1828), a thinker whom I consulted at every step in my own work because of his vast historical knowledge and his powerful intellect, and who at the same time baffled all my efforts at following the thought process of his dialectics or at understanding the experiential premises of his system.

Voegelin then detailed the assistance he received from other analysts of Hegel, ending with Kojève. That Kojève was not a simple academic expositor of Hegel is clear enough upon opening the pages of his *Introduction*. To understand what Voegelin made of Hegel and of Kojève in his mature thinking, we might briefly summarize a few of Strauss' objections to Kojève's teaching.

Apart from some philological disagreements regarding Xenophon, Strauss' objection to Kojève's account of the Hegelian account of history, of philosophy, and of religion, which ends, according to Kojève, in the final regime, which he called the universal and homogeneous state, was both commonsensical and pragmatic. First, Strauss said, Kojève had "an insufficient appreciation of the value of utopias," which were, strictly speaking, descriptions of "the simply good social order." More broadly, according to Strauss, "one can
speak of the utopia of the best tyranny." Kojève, however, "denies our contention that the good tyranny is a utopia" by pointing to the example of Salazar's Portugal and alluding to Stalin. Strauss considered it highly questionable that Stalin was a good tyrant. Second, Kojève was of the opinion that tyranny could not be understood on the basis of classical political science. According to Strauss, however, Kojève misconstrued or misinterpreted classical political science so that the question of its self-sufficiency necessarily remained open. Strauss agreed with Kojève that "the desire for honour is the supreme motive of men who aspire to tyrannical power." Whereas Kojève thought that men were attracted to tyranny because it was a means to accomplish the highest tasks, the classics did not believe one could accomplish the highest tasks by using the lowest methods, and they knew that tyranny involved very low methods indeed. To look upon tyranny as a means, Strauss said, a person must be blinded by passion. "By what passion? The most charitable answer is that he is blinded by desire for honour or prestige," which Kojève called "recognition." And finally, Kojève's synthesis of pagan and biblical morality "effects the miracle of producing an amazing lax morality out of two moralities both of which made very strict demands on self-restraint." The result, therefore, was inauthentic: Kojève encouraged others through his speech to perform base acts that he himself would never undertake. He did so, according to Strauss, because he wished to overlook "the untrue assumption that man as man is thinkable as a being that lacks awareness of sacred restraints or as a being that is guided by nothing but a desire for recognition."[16] Since that assumption is untrue, the satisfaction that all human beings desire can never be gained by recognition alone, not even by the universal recognition that apparently distinguishes the universal and homogeneous state from all other regimes.

Strauss and Kojève both agreed that recognition is sought by tyrants. Satisfaction, according to the classics, however, was identified with happiness, at least in the absence of "an omniscient God who demands from men a pure heart." Since Kojève's synthesis was miraculous (and reasonable men do not trust miracles) the question truly at issue was whether happiness came from recognition (and the tyrannical life) or from understanding (and the philosophical life). According to Strauss, there was an inherent conflict -- at one point he called it a tragic conflict -- between the philosopher and the political man, including the tyrant: the one sought happiness through his specific desire to understand the eternal things, the other through his specific desire for recognition. Moreover, this conflict would exist within the universal and homogeneous state. In any case, Strauss said, there were good reasons to oppose the advent of such a state. There was no guarantee that the leader deserved his position to a higher degree than others. Equals treated unequally is a recipe for
sedition, as Aristotle pointed out in Book V of *The Politics*.

If these objections were not sufficient, Strauss made a last observation. According to Kojève's interpretation of Hegel, fighting and labouring constitute the humanity of existence. But, according to Kojève, there is none in the universal and homogeneous state: all wars are over; there is nothing new to do. This seems to mean that the fulfilment of reasonable satisfaction implies the evaporation of man's humanity. "It is the state of Nietzsche's 'last man'," which therefore confirms "the classical view that unlimited technical progress and its accompaniment, which are indispensable conditions of the universal and homogeneous state, are destructive of humanity."

Analogous objections to Kojève's interpretation have been raised by Emil Fackenheim and Stanley Rosen, to say nothing of the criticism of "Hegel-scholars" who have found in Kojève's imaginative interpretation nothing more than a wilful distortion of a great philosopher's teaching. For Kojève, these objections could easily be met. Kojève was able to comprehend his critics more or less satisfactorily because, as Gadamer once observed, he never abandoned the "circle of reflection in which thought thinks itself." Even more emphatically than Strauss, Voegelin never entered the hermeneutic circle of Hegelian reflection.

The "story" of Voegelin's relation to Hegel, introduced above can now be resumed. The coexistence of the commonsense analyst of the English Reform Bill of 1831 or of the great German man-of-letters with the individual whose "existential deficiency" made it exceedingly difficult to understand his "experiential premises" was what made Hegel a "characteristically modern thinker." Accordingly, Voegelin wrote:

> the modernity of Hegel can be characterized as the coexistence of two selves, as an existence divided into a true and false self holding one another in such balance that neither the one nor the other ever becomes completely dominant. Neither does the true self become strong enough to break the system, nor does the false self become strong enough to transform Hegel into a murderous revolutionary or a psychiatric case.

Following Hegel's own language of self-interpretation, he was engaged not so much in constructing a "magic" circle of self-reflection, but a *grimoire* designed magically to master the entirety of history by discovering its meaning. "The author of the *Phänomenologie*," Voegelin wrote, "suffers so badly from the existential conflict between his two Selfs that it almost makes no sense to ask what Hegel really meant."
It is necessary, therefore to understand Hegel (and Kojève) without turning into a Hegelian or Kojèvian, which is to say, without believing in magic, which was more or less what Strauss meant by "miracles." Voegelin accomplished this analysis of Hegel's "two selves" by using the concepts of first and second reality developed in a literary context by Robert Musil and Heimeto von Doderer, and subsequently deployed by Voegelin in his Hitler lectures. More to the point, magicians do not, as a rule, explain their magic operations for the perfectly obvious reason that if they did, they would not be able to perform. Neither, according to Voegelin, did Hegel.

As a consequence Hegel's "explanatory formulae require translation to make their bearing intelligible." This problem of "translation" was what had for so many years made the Phenomenology "unintelligible" to Voegelin, in the sense that it was designed to cast a spell, and so not allow the reader to understand what was happening to him or her in the course of assimilating Hegel's text. Voegelin resisted Hegel's magic initially by admitting, as he said to Hart, that he could not understand him. And when at last he did understand Hegel, he understood that he was a sorcerer and so could resist, because sorcery decoded is sorcery disarmed. In Voegelin's words,

In the present instance, he [Hegel the sorcerer] cannot simply say: I am going to falsify history in open existence until it fits into my history in closed existence. Just as in an earlier instance, he could not say: I take symbols of alienation from various Neoplatonics, Gnostics, and mystics, and shall use them as the starting point for my magic enterprise of self-salvation. The effectiveness of the grimoire depends on the transformation of First into Second Reality as a fait accompli. The book is written in magic code which the reader, if he does not want to be taken in, must decipher. This process of decoding the Phänomenologie, however, is always difficult, and sometimes next to impossible, especially when political events have been put into code.

Fortunately Hegel had himself provided an example of a passage in the Phenomenology that was encoded and a translation of it en clair in a letter to his friend, F.I. Niethammer (29 April, 1814). Whether Kojève was aware of Hegel's correspondence seems unlikely since it was not published until 1961, which makes his own achievement in the Introduction -- namely to have completed a decrypt of Hegel's Phenomenology -- even more remarkable. The difficulties of translating Hegel's language of consciousness and self-consciousness, Geist and Gestalt, and all the other magic words into historical and political events "make it impossible to understand the purpose of the grimoire without a code at hand." By "code" Voegelin
meant a decrypt.

Such a decrypt, paralleling the "thoughts" of Second Reality with the persons and events in First Reality that have been converted into "thoughts" was elaborated, Voegelin said, by Kojève in the course of his lectures on the Phänomenologie and published as an appendix on "Structure de la Phénoménologie" in his Introduction à la lecture de Hegel (1947).[^27] This appendix, Voegelin said, correlated events in First Reality with specific sections of the Phenomenology. It is, moreover, "indispensable" to every "serious reader" of Hegel's book. Given its importance, "it inevitably raises the problem: How far back in Western history must the growth of sorcery be traced that comes to its climax in the Phänomenologie?" This was a question Voegelin touched on briefly in "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme" (1983), for example, but never examined systematically.[^28] Kojève, however, "confined himself to the decipherment of the Phänomenologie and the construction of the code. As he was a Marxist, i.e., the disciple of another great sorcerer, he did not study the problem of sorcery in Hegel. On the contrary, in 1968 he published a piece of sorcery of his own, the Essai d'une histoire raisonnée de la philosophie païenne, Tome 1, Les Présocratiques. The volume is an Hegelian transmogrification of pre-Socratic philosophy. I recommend it warmly to every student of contemporary sorcery."[^29]

Kojève's dispute with Strauss has received considerable attention.[^30] Not so with Voegelin and Kojève. Let us begin with the most obvious observation: despite all that has been written about his eccentricities and his famous "irony," and leaving aside his possible connection to KGB, Kojève's study of Hegel, both the Introduction and his posthumous publications, are indeed "transmogrifications" of philosophy. The interesting question is: why did Kojève undertake them? how could he both decode Hegel's grimoire and (apparently) be taken in by it? One answer is obvious: just as Hegel's motivation was, in the end, the libido dominandi, so too was Kojève's.[^31] Strauss may well have objected to such a crude characterization, which prompts a second, more subtle account.

Voegelin's friend, Alois Dempf, once pointed out that Voegelin had analysed the form of Hegel's project under the heading of "historiogenesis."[^32] By this term was indicated a speculative complex embracing the order of a particular society, its origin, and its subsequent development. Usually historians dismiss as legendary or mythical the accounts of the origin of a society -- the foundation of Rome by Aeneas, of Britain by Brutus, and so forth -- without further inquiry as to why anyone would bother to create such legends.
Voegelin argued that "the mythical part of historiogenetic speculation is not a piece of unhistorical fabulation, but an attempt to present the reasons that will raise the res gestae of the pragmatic part to the rank of history." The motives for undertaking the speculation arise from the experience of historical change and continuity. This experience is to be distinguished from that of cosmic rhythms for which suitable rituals and rites may be developed in order to ensure the arrival of spring, the flooding of the Nile, and so on. Historiogenetic speculations, however, place events, extending back to an absolute point of origin, upon a single line of irreversible time where change is not rhythmic but final. Moreover, the individuals who undertake the historiogenetic speculation invariably conclude by integrating a manifold of discontinuous events into a single story, their own. "To the aggressive overtones...there corresponds an undercurrent of obsessive anxiety above which the authors attempt to rise by the imaginative conversion of a temporal gain into a possession forever."

The invention of a single story is, clearly, an attempt to endow the contingency of historical change with the dignity and serenity of ultimate order.

Historiogenetic speculations, then, are undertaken in a mood of anxiety, not trust. Historical reality is deliberately distorted so that the story comes out right, that is, in conformity to the imaginative projections of the author. The object of the projection is to eclipse the unsettling reality of historical contingency with a second reality, the comforting meaning of which is the finality of the author's present. The technical problem Hegel faced concerned the breakdown of the Christian historiogenetic construction, which proceeded from the creation of the world through the history of Israel to Christianity, Rome, the Western sacred empire, down to the present. The attack by intellectuals during the Enlightenment -- Voltaire, for example -- on the Christian "theology of history" in the name of a secular "philosophy of history" had the undoubted merits (whatever its shortcomings in other respects) of putting the Christian historiogenesis into perspective as an imaginative construction. Henceforth it would be impossible for a conscientious historian to ignore the developments of India, China, Islam, or Russia as parallel to, though independent of Western history. Rather than abandon what Merleau-Ponty called the "historical authority" of the West, Hegel undertook to reinterpret Christian historiogenesis in terms of the dialectical unfolding of the Geist to its maximal articulation in his own reflections on the final events of his day. Kojève simply brought Hegel's speculation up to date.

The grave problem with all such historiogenetic constructions is that every evocation of an end of history, from that of Voltaire to that of Frank Fukuyama, soon becomes obsolete, and with obsolescence the discursive obfuscation and distortions of reality become evident. By forcing historical events into place along
a single line of meaningful time, by forcing the evidence of common reality to conform to the second reality of the system of science, first Hegel and then Kojève could, for a time (or within an imaginary second reality) appear to gain power over real history and thereby (again temporarily) overcome anxiety concerning its dangerous instability. But as Gerhart Niemeyer once said of ideologists in general, all they have done is to exchange uncertain truth for certain untruth. Kojève and Hegel suffered from analogous anxieties regarding the meaning of history -- or if you prefer, History. This experiential commonality or equivalence, it seems to me, enabled Kojève to construct his decrypt but to use it only within the context of the second reality of the Hegelian System of Science. In contrast, Voegelin used the decrypt to decode the Hegelian text but also to connect it to commonsense reality, thus exposing its status as grimoire.


See Roth, *Knowing and History*, 225-7.


Voegelin, "Response to Professor Altizer's 'A New History and a New but Ancient God?'" in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 12, 297.

Voegelin, "Response," 296.

This is argued at length in Cooper, *The End of History*.

*On Tyranny*, 189ff.

377-83.


[22] The difference is that Hegel spoke of his own magic words (Zauberwörte) and magic power (Zauberkraft). See Voegelin, "On Hegel," 221, 225, 240, 247-8.


