

The Philosopher of Reality

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Readings of Eric Voegelin

Edited by Tilo Schabert

With a Foreword by
András Láncki

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*The Philosopher of Reality:
Readings of Eric Voegelin*

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European Center of Political Philosophy

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FOREWORD

Our original idea of organising a conference on Eric Voegelin's thought in 2024 was that we wanted to focus on everpresent political issues of man's existence, and the European Center of Political Philosophy (Budapest) wanted to continue its efforts to highlight them. The title of the conference was borrowed from Eric Voegelin's *Autobiographical Reflections*: "Why Philosophy? To Capture Reality!" A year earlier, in 2023, we devoted our annual conference to Leo Strauss's ideas, the other great political thinker of the twentieth century. Both thinkers—Strauss and Voegelin—shared a basic understanding of the roots of European political thought. Their common understanding was based on their awe of the classical, i.e., ancient and medieval, and on their growing criticism of the modern answers to the most vexing issues in human life. In the case of Leo Strauss, the title ("The Knowledge of the Whole") was selected to pinpoint the central message of Strauss, who inexorably voiced the relevance of philosophy, noting that it is indispensable to understanding the meaning of life by claiming that the knowledge of the whole, i.e., love of wisdom or political knowledge, is not a futile effort of human rational abilities. Likewise, Eric Voegelin studied minutely the whole history of political thought in order to seek relevant answers to man's perpetual questions and problems across all of time. The disciples and followers of both thinkers organised themselves into schools, and there are a number of intellectuals who admit that their lives were changed owing to their intellectual encounter with either Leo Strauss or Eric Voegelin, or both.

Eric Voegelin (1901–1985), in his *Autobiographical Reflections*, stated that "the most important means of regaining contact with reality is the recourse to thinkers of the past who had not lost reality, or who were engaged in the effort of regaining it." According to Voegelin, modernity has been flooded with an ideological language to the extent that "language has been degraded and corrupted to such a degree that it no longer can be used for expressing the truth of existence." We believe that Voegelin's view still holds, and what is more, we should consult his works more intensively in order to regain the original meaning of concepts and the reality of our existence. Truth can only be eked out if we believe in the possibility that our concepts can cover, reveal, or unmask reality. The dominant intellectual attitude

has succumbed to a vague idea in modernity that man is destined to change available reality only because his rationality is capable of doing it. This is opposed to the classical view that our conditions, i.e., nature, provide us with all that we need. Instead, European modernity opted for the infinite manipulation of our facilities and conditions because we are capable of improving our given conditions. As a consequence, we seem to have lost the meaning and the concept of reality. What was natural and taken for granted has become questionable; thus, the basis of our knowledge has lost its firm grounding.

If there is something to defend, it is the classical: the attitude that philosophy, according to its original meaning—“love of wisdom”—has a real meaning. Furthermore, if love of wisdom still has a meaning, then its consequences must be taken seriously. The modern turn that the logical should have to be preferred in contrast with the metaphysical must be reconsidered because both history and philosophy cannot be uprooted from European culture without abolishing man. This volume, which follows the previous one containing the written versions of the lectures on Strauss, includes the lectures on Eric Voegelin that were presented in October 2024 at the Mathias Corvinus Collegium, Budapest.

I personally wish to thank Tilo Schabert for editing this volume and helping to bring Eric Voegelin’s ideas closer to our contemporary readers. I also wish to thank all the participants of the conference and contributors to this volume. All of them have thus assisted in the return of political philosophy to Europe. This is the primary aim of the European Center of Political Philosophy, which seeks to intensely raise awareness of the most relevant issues of our times to save our endangered European culture.

András Láncki
Budapest, May 2025

INTRODUCTION

All human beings live, without exception, in one and the same world. Not all of them, however, view this world’s reality in the same way. Humans are not free, simply due to their physical origins and the laws of their bodily existence, to live in a world other than that of which they are a part. They are free, though, to choose this or that stance towards that world. The reality that encompasses their existence and into which it is woven is, in human perception, both “hard” and “soft”. It is hard because this is *the* reality, the only one of which they have experiences: Reality, manifestly. It is soft because it allows humans to form their own notions concerning these experiences. All the views humans hold with respect to their experiences of reality are of their own making. Reality is there, as the object of human experience. Yet, in human recognition, it is not necessarily there as it is. There are thousands of possibilities for human beings to imagine reality, hence, to imagine worlds formed in a way other than that wherein all of them actually exist.

This, as the book here shows, is the issue one might wish to start from in appraising the scholarly work of Eric Voegelin. What motivated him to create his oeuvre? What is the existential, what is its intellectual background? What is it aimed at, what are its messages? The responses that we receive throughout this book are unambiguous: At the centre of Voegelin’s attention was the conflict between imagined realities and reality as it is. Or, more precisely, Voegelin’s intense experience of the conflict. In his writings, Voegelin very rarely alluded to himself, nor did he intersperse the flow of his thinking with personal remarks. Occasionally, he referred to “the philosopher”, in expressions such as “it is the philosopher’s task” or “seen from the viewpoint of the philosopher”. By “philosopher”, he alluded to his own person, allowing himself to appear in his writings only with the greatest possible discretion. In general, however, one will have the impression, in reading his texts, that he, the person Eric Voegelin, remains very much aloof. Yet one should not draw from this the conclusion that his oeuvre and his personal life, with all the experiences he made in it, are completely separate areas. The truth is quite the opposite.

In various ways, the following contributions make this evident. Reading and understanding Voegelin means, first of all, recognising a profound unity of life and work. The experiences that he had in his life—social, political, intellectual experiences—were for him the founts of his reflections. From these, eventually, were derived all the trains of thought that he worked out in his writings. From his time as a Rockefeller Fellow in the United States emerged his understanding and interpretation of the American civilisation. Having witnessed the evil brought about by the totalitarian movements, and in particular the Nazi regime—from which he himself only narrowly escaped—he set about searching for the sources and origins, the intellectual as well as social ones, to which the rise of these movements could be ascribed. As dismayed by the “waste land” as T. S. Eliot, of the spiritual and cultural aridity that marked the early twentieth century, Voegelin energetically engaged in a widening of his historical, philosophical, religious, and civilisational knowledge. He wished to identify firm philosophical grounds, in whatever epoch, in whatever form they offered themselves, upon which he could build a response to the challenges presented by the “waste land”. This would be nothing less than a truly “new”, namely in acts of rediscovery, re-founded theory of human existence in society and history. Voegelin set out on an intellectual journey, the pursuit of which demanded a lot of courage, persistence, hard work, and discipline.

Not surprisingly, then, we find traits of Voegelin’s character being spoken about in the contributions to this book. I wish to emphasise here what seems to me to be the most important one. It is the main interest, as we shall see, that stirred him precisely to choose those matter for scrutiny and examination that eventually became the subject matters of his oeuvre. It is also the trait that kept him going during the course of his career as a scholar and academic. Voegelin the person and Voegelin the author were moved by a sympathy for his fellow humans. This sympathy was fundamentally present in the person. It was equally alive in the author. When he, the scholar and author, for instance, spoke or wrote about the atrocities committed by those who pretended to be the secular saviours of his time, his words were full of ire. It seemed that he wished to undo those crimes with his wrath and fury. The contradiction in the programme of “killing men in order to save them”—the telling formulation of David Walsh in his contribution—profoundly affected Voegelin’s attitude of sympathy. He did not speak of it, in his writings,

with reference to his own person. The present book, however, amply shows that it underlies his oeuvre.

The intellectual and institutional betrayal that characterised the time and Voegelin’s experience and criticism of it is another issue dealt with in the following essays. Again, we can discern the correspondence of Voegelin the man with Voegelin the author or, in other words, the unity of his life and works. We meet with a person of exemplary decency and ethical straightforwardness. We experience a scholar who acted in defence of humankind and therefore always insisted on the concreteness of human existence. Neither with “race”, nor “class”, nor “interest groups”, nor “nations”, nor an abstract “humanity”, Voegelin held, can a science of human affairs be concerned with when it is out to do justice to human reality. What it has to care for are concrete persons in concrete historical and political circumstances. The human experience is an experience made individually; no one else knows an individual’s experiences and the individual’s responses to them in the way that the individual does. It is this kind of knowledge from which a theory of human affairs has to proceed. Then, it will be authentic, namely at the centre of the question of what it means to be human.

What indeed does this mean in practice? Voegelin provided two answers: a methodical and a substantive one. He always insisted, first, on the demand to recognise and deal with the entire range of human experience—hence, to acknowledge and be concerned with all that humans perceive and become aware of through their perceptions. He consistently pointed out, second, that the realm of human reason includes a capacity for transcending pure rationality and, by this process, apprehending a reality “beyond”, understood, upon reflection, as “divine”. To be human, in recognition of the full range of human experiences, therefore, meant also and effectively to be or to become open towards the reality of the “divine”. These two answers became decisive for Voegelin’s oeuvre. They led him to formulate the principal critique of modernity, which the following chapters will review from different perspectives and in detail. Rationality alone, as conceived by the “moderns”, is not a sufficient basis for working out a theory of human affairs.

In consequence, Voegelin turned towards corpora of knowledge that offered him the “material” (in the language of Voegelin’s concept of empiricism) to build the theory of human affairs he was striving towards: the Hebrew Bible, Ancient

Greek philosophy, the Christian Bible, the writings of Christian authorities, and certain political thinkers, poets, and novelists. Someone who regards this departure under the premise of modern “progress” might (mis-)understand it as a movement “backwards”. However, this book here presents the chance to understand Voegelin’s enterprise as indeed an exodus: from a long period of uncertainty “back” to the firm ground of exploring the reality of human existence within the reality of the world.

Tilo Schabert

Reality, Lost and Found: Eric Voegelin as a Guide in and out of Trickster Land

ÁRPÁD SZAKOLCZAI

How can reality itself be lost? This is the puzzle evoked by the title of this conference and rendered explicit in the title of this paper.

Voegelin on Reality and Its Eclipse

This theme—the concern with reality, the realness of reality, the need to keep our sense of reality, and the increasing threats to this sense in the contemporary world—was a recurrent theme of Eric Voegelin’s work, prominent in some of his most important writings, though hardly ever as a main theme. It was present in *The New Science of Politics*, as evidently any form of Gnosticism, modern or not, implies a rejection of the reality of the natural world. It was present in *Anamnesis*, especially in the long essay “What is Political Reality”. It was present in the lecture series *Hitler and the Germans*, especially through the concern with “Second Reality”, taken from novels, especially Heimito von Doderer’s *The Demons*. Of particular importance is

Voegelin's 1969 essay "Eclipse of Reality": due to its title, which directly addresses the loss of reality; due to the occasion for which it was written, a memorial volume for his lifelong friend, Alfred Schutz, with a main theme of Schutz's work being "multiple realities", while Schutz was also a main interlocutor, through their correspondence, in discussions regarding the relevance of the modern Gnosticism thesis; due to its discussion of Jean-Paul Sartre, the most famous intellectual of the times, singling him out as an example for the deformation of "projecting an imaginary reality", or a "Second Reality";¹ and finally, due to its extensive and occasionally joint discussion of Comte's positivistic sociology and Hegel's philosophy, both being key examples for modern Gnosticism, according to Voegelin.

Important insights about the loss of reality are contained in *Autobiographical Reflections*, especially the pages from which the conference title was taken. The context is important and worthy of a few words. The conference call is from the title of a central section of the book, where Voegelin is offering the motivations for his work, culminating in a philosophy of history.² His work is rooted in the political situation, marked by a flood of ideological language, traced to the end of the First World War—though it is traced further back to 1870 and the "fantastic destruction of the German language" in the Imperial period.³ This gives the proper meaning of philosophy, back to the times of Plato, as standing up against the dominant ideologies of the time, marked by "spiritually energetic people" who are "breaking out of the dominant intellectual group". The examples listed, however, are not professional philosophers but novelists like George Orwell, Albert Camus, and Thomas Mann. They succeeded not on their own but by finding people who could be called "guides", as the "most important means of regaining contact with reality is the recourse to thinkers of the past who had not yet lost reality, or who were engaged in the effort of regaining it".⁴ This includes a return to myths, where Voegelin singles out for attention the collaboration between Thomas Mann and Károly Kerényi, central for the *Joseph* novels. But it also implies a revisiting of classical philosophy, theology, ancient history, even archaeology—or, as two key sentences state: "Recapturing

1 Eric Voegelin, "The Eclipse of Reality," in *What is History? And Other Late Unpublished Writings*, eds. Thomas A. Hollweck and Paul Caringella (Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 112.

2 Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections* (University of Missouri Press, 2011), 118.

3 Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 45.

4 Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 120.

reality in opposition to its contemporary deformation requires a considerable amount of work. One has to reconstruct the fundamental categories of existence, experience, consciousness, and reality."⁵

But the central importance Voegelin attributed to reality, in this sense, perhaps is best revealed in an anecdote told by Gregor Sebba. In a discussion, Voegelin expressed his dissent regarding the use of close-ups in films, claiming that a face is not a landscape, so one should not start wondering about it, adding a revealing phrase: "Stay with rrreality"—the triple "r" in the original.⁶

Voegelin's manifold discussions of reality, the sense of reality, and its loss cluster around three major themes. The first is the impact of wars, especially the First World War, on human history. Sociologists and social theorists, in conformity with the self-understanding of modernity, focus on the role played by progress in the genesis of modernity and thus underplay, or even outright ignore, wars. It is quite revealing that in the December 1999 issue of *International Sociology*, which contains a symposium on war and modernisation theory, and the February 2001 issue of the *European Journal of Social Theory*, which was based on a symposium on "War and social theory" held in 2000 at the European University Institute, several contributors explicitly discuss the failure of sociology and social theory to properly discuss warfare.

For Voegelin, however, the First World War was an epoch-making caesura. He lived through it, just as he later survived the Second World War; through political anthropology and its central term "liminality", one can show the tightness of his connection with the Great War: he was about 13 and a half years old when the First World War started and almost 18 when it ended, so practically his entire adolescence, usually lasting between the ages of 13 and 18, occurred under its shadow, representing a coincidence of personal and global historical liminality, making it a particularly momentous rite of passage. Voegelin was thus able to experience firsthand that the world in which we all live was the product, more than anything else, of the Great War.

5 Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 121.

6 Gregor Sebba, "Prelude and Variations on the Theme of Eric Voegelin," in Ellis Sandoz, ed., *Eric Voegelin's Thought: A Critical Appraisal* (Duke University Press, 1982), 89. This point also recalls Goethe's hostility to the microscope and the telescope, expressed in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.

The second point concerns novels. In a much-quoted sentence of *Anamnesis*, Voegelin stated that if “one wishes to inform oneself about the great problems of thinking about order in Germany, one would do better to read the literary works of Robert Musil, Hermann Broch, Thomas Mann, Heimito von Doderer, or the dramas of Frisch and Dürrenmatt, rather than the professional literature of politics”.⁷ It does not require much argument to make the point that many of the most important works of most of these writers, like *The Magic Mountain*, *The Sleepwalkers*, *The Man Without Qualities*, or *The Demons*, were directly preoccupied with the processes that led to the First World War or that started in its aftermath.

Third, Voegelin’s diagnosis regarding the increasing loss of reality often accompanies, directly or indirectly, his famous, though also controversial, discussion of modern Gnosticism, or modernity as a Gnostic revolt. The connection, in a way, is evident, as Gnosticism historically was a doctrine denying the goodness, even the reality, of the world, attributing creation to an evil demiurge.

But how is it possible to study the unreality of the apparent reality itself? Here again, Voegelin offers precious indications with his modern Gnosticism thesis and the related problematisation of scientism, but the point must be taken further. The central issue is that science *as* science does not offer a way, as science has no clue about the realness of reality. Science, supposedly, deals with “facts”; this itself is a very problematic word, as it is etymologically rooted in the Latin word *fare* “make”, so it focuses not on what is, but on what is *made*. But reality, essentially, is not a “fact”, but a *value*: its heart is what is really real and not fabricated, imitated, copied, or concocted. This is why positivistic sociology, focusing on “facts” and “data”, just like neo-Kantian and analytical philosophy, with its similar obsession with “facts” and “logic”, fail to touch upon the realness of reality. Reality as a value, however, was central to medieval philosophy, with its focus on the given as a gift, on *datum* and *donum*, and their difference—though from our perspective what is important is what is shared by them, visible in the English etymological identity of the “given” and the “gift”. It is this concern with existence as Being (*Sein*) that was central for Heidegger, and it is a real pity that, for some reason, the greatest philosopher of the twentieth century abandoned his rootedness in the theological

⁷ Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 191.

philosophies of Aquinas and Bonaventure. A return to givenness and giftedness is central for political anthropology, which intends to approach and study the realness of reality and its systemic loss in the modern world – this genuine “Trickster Land”.⁸

Political Anthropology: An Approach to Retrieve Reality

Political anthropology, as understood here, following the journal *International Political Anthropology* and the Routledge series *Contemporary Liminality*, is not a subfield of anthropology as a discipline, but rather a genuinely interdisciplinary area aiming to explore the anthropological underpinnings of politics, or the “pre-political”, in the broadest possible sense of the term.⁹ Political anthropology addresses three main questions. First of all, what is it to be human? What does it mean that we are human? What is a human being, or, rather, what is *human* “Being”? Second, however, and following Aristotle, “man” is not an isolated and atomised being but inherently a *zoon politikon*. So, what does it mean to be human in the sense of a *zoon politikon*? Third, and taking this point further, what does the modern world do to our very humanity; how does it impinge upon our humanness; what is the impact of modernity on our being human?

The three main axes of political anthropology directly address these questions. Starting with the last question, it is addressed by genealogy in the Nietzsche-Weber-Foucauldian sense, incorporating comparative historical sociology, as Max Weber was much inspired by Nietzsche. It is into this “Weberian-genealogical” lineage that the work of the most important followers of Weber’s historical method, like Norbert Elias, Franz Borkenau, Eric Voegelin, Michel Foucault, and Reinhart Koselleck, belong. The second question takes us back to classical political philosophy or philosophical anthropology. The central, towering figure is Plato, understood as a political “realist” and on-the-spot diagnostician of the collapse of Athenian democracy. But political anthropology also relies on the work of Aristotle

⁸ This is exposed in detail in Arpad Szakolczai, *Post-Truth Society: A Political Anthropology of Trickster Logic* (Routledge, 2022).

⁹ For a comprehensive treatment, see Arpad Szakolczai and Paul O’Connor, eds., *Encyclopedia of Political Anthropology* (Edward Elgar, 2025).

and the pre-Socratics, instead of playing one or a select few against the rest. As for modern philosophy, political anthropology ignores the main line of modern rationalism—from Bacon and Descartes, through Locke, Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel, up to contemporary analytical philosophy—relying instead, on the one hand, on the great “maverick” philosophers (Pascal, Vico, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche), and on the other, the hermeneutical tradition (Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Gadamer). The two lines were brought together, in a way, by Heidegger. The third axis is social or cultural anthropology, though understood in a manner different from standard disciplinary historiography. All central anthropological terms (“liminality”, “trickster”, “imitation”, “schismogenesis”, “gift-relations”, “participation”) were developed by anthropologists working outside the mainstream, in isolation, and mostly in a completely marginalised position: Arnold van Gennep, Marcel Mauss, Paul Radin, Gregory Bateson, and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, but also Victor Turner, René Girard, and Colin Turnbull—the great “mavericks” of anthropology.¹⁰

The three main axes are complemented by four further subfields. Among these, the most important is archaeology: Political anthropology is keen to push the time horizon for understanding the dynamics of the present back into prehistory, up to the late Palaeolithic. The cave art of Chauvet, Lascaux, and Altamira is an obligatory starting point, not denying the importance of previous developments, especially concerning burial rituals and the rise of language, but by arguing that the givenness of the kind, quality, and character of such art is a necessary departure for understanding the dynamics of human history.

The fifth axis is comparative mythology, which complements both anthropology and archaeology. Some of the most important works on the figure of the trickster have been done by comparative mythologists, like Georges Dumézil or Károly Kerényi. Political anthropology is also interested in using works of art, and the history of art, for understanding both images and words. Concerning words, the vital importance of novels has already been mentioned; concerning images, the milestone figure is Aby Warburg, the founder of modern art history as a discipline, considered an anthropologist by Giorgio Agamben, also a maverick, never admitted into German academia—just like Károly Kerényi, incidentally.

¹⁰ For details, see Arpad Szakolczai and Bjørn Thomassen, *From Anthropology to Social Theory: Rethinking the Social Sciences* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

Finally, in my reading, certain theological considerations are also important for political anthropology: classical theology, but also contemporary orthodox theology, which arguably is more interesting than Western theology, plagued by an “inferiority complex” towards “rationalism”. One might mention here the trinitarian ecclesiology of John Zizioulas, Pavel Florensky’s *Ikhnostasis*, or his contemporary follower Sergey Horujy, who recognised affinities between the later work of Michel Foucault and orthodox theology.¹¹

While the agenda of this kind of political anthropology was not taken directly from Voegelin, affinities with his work are evident. This is visible in the following programmatic statement that comes right after the previously quoted sentence about novels: “Today the most important contributions to a political science—not in the academic but in the noetic sense—come from archaeology, the research on myths and ethnic cultures, the history of the ancient Orient, of classical antiquity and the Far East, from classical philology, the history of Judaism and Christianity, of patristic and scholasticism, from the sciences of comparative religion and comparative literature”.¹² The list, most importantly, starts with archaeology, not often associated with Voegelin’s work; continues with mythology and anthropology, one of the few occasions where Voegelin explicitly refers to contemporary anthropology, intimating close connections between mythology, anthropology, and archaeology; and continues with a combined focus on history and the history of thought, prioritising the classical period over modernity, implying a joint study of thought *and* of language, and placing a specific emphasis on religious ideas, with an evident emphasis on Christianity and its prehistory.

Three Shortcomings in Voegelin

Still, in spite of the importance of not just the ideas but Voegelin’s entire stance on political anthropology, three related shortcomings are present in Voegelin’s work that need to be rectified. The first concerns anthropology. Academically, anthropology traditionally implied the study of non-modern societies, and thus it became a major

¹¹ Sergey S. Horujy, *Practices of the Self and Spiritual Practices: Michel Foucault and the Eastern Christian Discourse* (Eerdmans, 2015).

¹² Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 191.

prejudice of modernist thinking, following evolutionary ideas and mentalities, that anthropologists deal with exotic societies that have little to teach us moderns in a theoretical sense. Such denigration of non-modern cultures usually goes together with the similar denigration of historical evidence—so, as Voegelin made ample use of history, one could have expected him to pay closer attention to anthropological evidence. However, here another problem intervened: mainstream academic anthropology came to be dominated by the not very interesting works of Durkheim and Boas, Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, or Lévi-Strauss and Bourdieu, which tried to import and impose modernist ideas and ideologies like neo-positivism, neo-Kantianism, structuralism, or Marxism on anthropological evidence, marginalising more interesting and illuminating approaches and ideas, like the work of Arnold van Gennep, Paul Radin, or Gregory Bateson, and concepts like liminality, trickster, imitation, or schismogenesis, terms mentioned previously.

The second concerns modern economic theory. Voegelin never paid close attention to economic theory, as, after some initial flirting with the ideas of Marx, by late 1919, he became convinced of the correctness of neoclassical economics.¹³ Throughout Voegelin's life, thinkers were basically required to choose between Marxism and conventional economic theory—with the refusal of one almost by necessity entailing the espousal of the other. However, the real problem, and one that nowadays has become particularly pressing, is that both are equally wrong. Back to their common source, the theories of Ricardo, and his skilful—or rather tricksterlike—cancelling of stock markets from economic theory, hiding that stock markets developed out of fairs and long-distance trade, not local markets. Modern economic theory, therefore, is pure ideology, confusing and conflating stock markets and supermarkets; it is of no help to understand why what we now call “economic life”—but which did not exist before the rise of the modern world—gained the social and cultural significance it has today, not to mention its exorbitant human price.

The third problem, in a way, is the most astonishing, though similarly widespread. In his extremely broad historical work, Voegelin never expressed interest in the Byzantine world, particularly its collapse. At most, he had some plans to study the Byzantine Empire as a case of “Orthodox Empires”. This neglect is shared by the most important

historically-oriented social thinkers, who similarly ignored the Byzantine world. Yet, one could argue that Byzantium, *especially* through the Fall of Constantinople, was the single most important source behind the rise of the modern world. The question of why this is so consistently ignored goes well beyond the theme of this article, and I can only allude to the method-logical problem of modern historiography to deal with events, focusing instead, following Marx and Durkheim, on long-term historical changes at the supposedly “basic” economic level. The approach of political anthropology, with key terms like “liminality” and the “trickster”, offers a theoretically grounded perspective concerning the in-depth reality-altering role of events.

Still, at one juncture, Voegelin came close to realising the significance of Byzantium. In late 1956, he travelled to Vienna, encountering there the wave of refugees from Hungary after the Russians crushed the anti-communist popular uprising. He mentioned his impressions in a 29 December 1956 letter to Robert B. Heilman, claiming that the situation was

[q]uite interesting at the moment, because the impact of the Hungarian affairs makes itself strongly felt (even in the streets and hotels: Vienna is full of Hungarian emigrants). What strikes one in talking with these people (historians, journalists, etc.) is the long-range view which they take: the manifold of the Byzantine and Asiatic cultures [...] they regret that so little is really known in the West about the undercurrents of experiences and ideas in the East. They consider it the most important task for science, to find out a good deal more about Eastern living culture than is known in the West today. The Western literature, including the American, about Communism—based as it is on the reading of a few books and articles of persons who hold the limelight—they consider ludicrous.¹⁴

However, Voegelin would soon return to the States, then move to Munich, and ultimately forget, like practically everyone in the modern West, the potential—and indeed vital—importance of Byzantine matters.

¹⁴ Charles R. Embry, ed., *Robert B. Heilman and Eric Voegelin: A Friendship in Letters 1944-1984* (University of Missouri Press, 2004), 164.

¹³ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 38.

Diagnoses of Unreality: Wars and Literature

The capacity to recognise the reality-altering significance of events is classically assigned to poets, and indeed, there were key poets who realised on the spot that the Great War not only brought unprecedented suffering but also altered reality.

One of these was Endre Ady, the greatest Hungarian poet of the times. He wrote “Memory of a Summer Night” in February 1917, a particularly significant moment of the First World War, with the German escalation of submarine warfare and the first 1917 revolution in Russia, but backdated the composition to the night when the First World War broke out, 28 July 1914, assigning an apocalyptic significance to that night:

Endre Ady, “Memory of a Summer Night”

An angry angel hurled from the heavenly height
 Drumroll alarms onto the sombre earth,
 Hundreds of stars burnt out their light,
 Hundreds of young brains were overturned,
 Hundreds of veils were torn, defiled:
 It was a curious,
 Curious summer night.
 [...]
 I dreamt that the dead came back to light.
 [...]
 The worthless were swaggering bravely,
 Fancy robbers went out to rob,
 And true-hearted men had to hide:
 [...]
 We gathered that man was imperfect,
 Tight-fisted when sharing his love,
 But still, it just couldn't be right,
 The live and the dead on the turning wheel:
 Has man ever been a punier mite,
 And the Moon in a more mocking mood

Than on that terrible night?
 It was a curious,
 Curious summer night.
 And horror leaned over the spirits
 with malevolent, gloating delight:
 The secrets of every forefather
 Dwelt deep in the souls of the sons.
 And Thought, the proud servant of Man,
 Inebriated, went out to lead
 His blood-shedding, dreadful Wedding Feast.
 [...]
 But I am still alive, though different,
 Transfigured by that shattering event,
 And as I am waiting for a God,
 I remember that terror-haunted,
 Devastating, world-burying night:
 It was a curious,
 Curious summer night.

The poem contains repeated allusions to the at once destructive and transfiguring, or destructively formative, character of that night and the events that came from it: everything was subsequently altered by the War and the ensuing “waiting for God” mentality.

On the opposite end of Europe, in January 1919, W. B. Yeats would write one of his most important poems, *The Second Coming*, in a similar vein:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
 The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
 Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all convictions, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
 Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
 [...]

Each one of the first eight lines carries a message with visionary intensity about the utter collapse of the world order, not during the bloody events but the moment the war ended and one might have hoped that the world would improve. Ireland, as a place, has its importance, as while the First World War wasn't fought on Irish soil, there the War led to a civil war, just as it happened, already at the time of the poem, in Russia, posing the question of the link between wars, World Wars, and civil wars.

Poems are not "just poems": they embody philosophy; in a sense, they *are* philosophy. The separation of poetry and philosophy is a modern artefact, and just that, an artefact, in the worst sense of the word: concocted, not real, not genuine, just a copy for mass consumption—for those who lost the sense of distinction, between the genuine and the copy. Heidegger's philosophy was developed through conversations with poetry, especially Hölderlin; while on the first page of his *Tragic Sense of Life*, Unamuno also claimed that "philosophy lies closer to poetry than to science". Citations could be multiplied from *real*—not "professional"—philosophers.

Or social scientists, like Max Weber. At the end of his famous January 1919 talk "Politics as a Vocation", also concerned with widespread revolutionary intoxication, Weber claimed, "Not summer's bloom lies ahead of us, but rather a polar night of icy darkness and hardness [...] [w]here there is nothing [*wo nichts ist*]".¹⁵ The temporal coincidence with Yeats's poem is striking—just as the coincidence of his "Science as a Vocation" talk with the Great October Revolution, both taking place on 7 November 1917. Furthermore, his gloomy prediction is offered in contrast to Shakespeare's Sonnet 102, which Weber cites in the lines just above the previous quote, and its "summer's bloom".

The underlying experience was formulated with rare poignancy by Sándor Márai (1900–1989), Voegelin's exact contemporary, who was a poet but especially a novelist, now well-known all around the world. In a programmatic 1941 book, written on the occasion of revisiting his native city, lost to Hungary due to the 1919

peace treaty, he wrote as a flashback: "Two basic feelings traversed the time of my youth and adulthood. One, the sense of 'something is not right', as a heredity of my childhood and its time of peace. [...] The second, more preoccupying feeling taught me that 'something is happening', with me and the world around; that forces have been liberated over which our rulers are no longer masters".¹⁶

Poets perceived and expressed this feeling on the spot, during or right after the First World War; but, while social scientists and political philosophers still continue to celebrate the irresistible march of progress and the conquests of liberal democracy, novelists only took a decade to digest the events and their consequences. An emblematic example is Hermann Broch (1896–1951) and his novel *The Sleepwalkers*. Broch and Voegelin became acquainted in Vienna, in a way even friends. Broch gave up his family business and began to study philosophy after the War, to get a grip on what was going on, but a few years later, he left in disgust, finding the kind of philosophy practised in Viennese universities—which established the foundations of contemporary professional philosophy(!)—meaningless. Instead, he started to write, and *The Sleepwalkers*, started in 1928 and published in 1931, was an effort to capture the undercurrents that led to the outbreak of the First World War and resulted in contemporary unreality: "[t]he provisory seems to have become the definitive", which offered the paradoxical "certitude of living in a sort of second-class reality, giving rise to a kind of unreal reality, of real unreality", which was hovering between various states and sleepwalking in an "unstable flux".¹⁷ This experience of unreality was a joint product of the utopian searches for revolutions (which are "struggles between unreality and unreality") and the dire, unreal reality of wars, but such unreality was also prepared philosophically by the excessive and absurd concern with rationally regulating reality: "the frontier between reality and unreality [*die Grenze zwischen Wirklichkeit und Unwirklichkeit*] in life can never be clearly drawn, and a man who lives within a world of precisely adjusted relations will refuse to allow that there can be another world whose relations are incomprehensible and inscrutable to him: so when he steps out of his firmly established world or is torn from it he becomes impatient, he becomes an ascetic and passionate fanatic, even a rebel".¹⁸

¹⁶ Sándor Márai, *Kassai őrvárát* (Helikon, 2003 [1941]), 43–4.

¹⁷ Hermann Broch, *The Sleepwalkers* (North Point, 1985), 575–7.

¹⁸ Broch, *The Sleepwalkers*, 369.

¹⁵ Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mill, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Routledge, 1948).

Broch finished and published his novel relatively quickly; Heimito von Doderer (1896–1966) and Béla Hamvas (1897–1968) took much longer to finish theirs. The parallels between them in writing their most important novels are striking, meriting a few words. Doderer and Hamvas were born just a few months apart. They turned 18 soon after the First World War started so were duly recruited and fought through the Great War. They went to university after but found the academic world, dominated by neo-Kantianism and neo-positivism, of little interest, so they both became journalists and thus intimately familiar with the even greater existential corruptness that already dominated the media. This led them to start writing their novels around 1928–1929. Both took as their model Dostoevsky's *The Demons*, as reflected in the titles of the novels-in-progress: *Die Dämonen*, for Doderer, the German title of Dostoevsky's novel; and *Ördögösök*, for Hamvas, the Hungarian title of Dostoevsky's novel being *Ördögök* (literally, "Devils"). Both worked for years on their novel but considered themselves not yet up to finishing it, so put it aside. Both returned to completing it after the Second World War, Hamvas between 1948 and 1951, Doderer between 1951 and 1956. Hamvas altered the title, which became *Karnevál* (Carnival), and having finished, sewed it into his mattress, as he knew it could not be published—it first appeared posthumously, in 1985, to great acclaim. Doderer kept the title, and it immediately became a great success.

Unreality was a central concern of both books. Doderer developed in his novel two terms that are fundamental to Voegelin's work, "second reality" and "*Apperzeptionbeweiterung*", or the failure to perceive reality as it is: a resistance to reality, producing false realities. The term "second reality" is introduced through a story about the Middle Ages, "exemplifying the dominant factor of our time: a second reality [*zweite Wirklichkeit*]. This is something which is set up alongside the first, actual reality".¹⁹ Second realities emerge due to our efforts to surround ourselves with constructs: hobbyhorses, fabrications of our imagination. The creation of second realities implies the taking up of a mask, but also something much more sinister: one "enter[s] the danger zone of self-deception";²⁰ the "honest dishonesty" of identifying ourselves with our own constructs, and the belief that the second reality is the only reality.

The mask was also a central concern for Hamvas's novel; in fact, it is the reason he altered the original title, as Hamvas explicitly shifted his focus from demons to the mask. This did not mean a radical shift in perspective, as Hamvas remained preoccupied with the demonic forces unleashed in and by modernity, realising that such demons are set free through the impersonality generated by the mask. The demonic, the impersonal, and the mask are identical: "the impersonal is demonic power", nothing but a work of "demiurgic phantasmagoria".²¹ This is expressed with special force towards the end of the novel:

We live under a curse. This curse is called 'mask'. I cannot reach the other human being. His illness and madness and sin become dense and turned into a form – a false form [*álforma*]. This dense false form is the mask. In most cases it pushes the living being out of its place and tries to live in its stead. This is the mask; this is the larva, the madness. The mask is the devil. The devil is not a face [*arc*], but a mask [*álarc*, literally "false face"]. Larva. This is why the devil always lies. It cannot even be real. It cannot live. The devil has no real existence on its own, only to the extent in which it sucks the vital force of others. It has no reality; only as much reality as it can take away from the others.²²

These three novels are only some, though particularly important, examples for studying post-First World War unreality. There are others. Moving towards the East, one could add Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, which "coincidentally" was also started in 1928, and where not just demonic forces, but the Devil in person, with some aides, appear in the Moscow of the 1930s, and where a key scene of the novel, to reinforce the links with the mask and the carnival, takes place in a circus. Moving towards the West, one might evoke *The Long Weekend*, a historical book by Robert Graves about the 1918–1939 period, a title itself evoking permanent liminality: "Coward was the dramatist of disillusion, as Eliot was its tragic poet, Aldous Huxley its novelist, and James Joyce its prose epic writer. They all had in common a sense

¹⁹ Heimito von Doderer, *The Demons* (Knopf, 1961), 1018.

²⁰ von Doderer, *The Demons*, 181.

²¹ Béla Hamvas, *Karnevál*, 3 vols. (Medio, 1997), I, 299.

²² Hamvas, *Karnevál*, III: 369–70.

of the unreality of time”.²³ And, as if to confirm Graves, Aldous Huxley, in *Brave New World Revisited*, singles out unreality as his central concern in the original novel: “They did not foresee what in fact has happened, above all in our Western capitalist democracies—the development of a vast mass communications industry, concerned in the main neither with the true nor the false, but with the unreal, the more or less totally irrelevant. In a word, they failed to take into account man’s almost infinite appetite for distractions.”²⁴

The Source of Unreality: Valorising Destruction

Contemporary mainstream modern self-understanding not only ignores the foundational role of wars in shaping the modern world, but outright valorises destruction. This can be seen in the prioritising of revolutions over wars in the standard account of the rise of modernity. However, the rise of the modern world was primarily not due to revolutions, but to wars. In fact, revolutions hardly existed at all: there were only wars, ever more frequent and devastating wars, which indeed steadily and inexorably ended European culture and European civilisation, replacing it with the modern world that is increasingly resembling less and less the fundamental concerns, or “values”, of European culture.

The most evident examples are the most famous Communist revolutions of the twentieth century in Russia and China. The Bolshevik Revolution took place in the fourth year of the First World War when a rather minuscule but well-organised group managed to take power from the fatally weakened central authorities. And it was followed by an extremely bloody and long-lasting civil war. The case of China is almost identical, except that it took place after the Second World War. However, the French Revolution was not much different: it took place after the centre became fatally weakened following a series of lasting, costly, and mostly meaningless wars. Even the English Revolution took place towards the end of the extremely bloody Thirty Years’ War, which rocked the whole of European civilisation; but, more

importantly, it was a corollary of religious developments, the Reformation and the rise of Protestantism, and the religious and civil wars of the sixteenth century—the origin of the modern world, according to Koselleck. Furthermore, the basic source of these developments was the Fall of Constantinople. The significance of this event can be understood through the main terms of political anthropology: “liminality”, “imitation”, “the trickster”, and “schismogenesis”.

The modern world is not the product of revolutions, but of wars. It is the outcome of ever greater destruction. The focus on revolutions is an ideology that helps not only to ignore wars but also to *valorise* destruction. The valorisation of destruction is further promoted by economic theory through the idea of creative destruction. First exposed systematically by Joseph Schumpeter, it is now a main instrument of economic policy. The idea is almost too well-known: True entrepreneurial innovation does not simply add to the existing stock of knowledge but generates something new by sweeping away the old and obsolete. This idea not only offers a blank justification of any technological change but also highlights the complicity between the violence of wars and revolutions and the similarly essentially violent character of technologically driven economic growth.

Being Conservative

Standing up against the ideology of destruction, even if camouflaged as “revolutionary” and “creative”, first of all, means standing up for the preservation of the concrete. The ideology of creative destruction, whether in economics, politics, or technology, claims that whatever exists concretely, in its own time and place, is accidental, contingent, undesired, and unplanned, and so it must be replaced by something perfect, universal, wanted, and intended. Overcoming this pernicious but deeply alluring ideology must start from the opposite side: by valorising whatever exists concretely. This does not mean unconditional adulation of every accident, but it valorises—instead of destruction—the etymological link between being (*essere*) and essence. Being, or existence, implies something much more than an accident: a duration, a coming together of a thing, an object, that escapes the infinite flux of elementary particles and especially waves—an object that resists the potentially destructive impact of the surrounding forces. Being “concrete”, first of all, and

²³ Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Weekend: Social History of Great Britain, 1918-39* (Penguin, 1971), 147. The meaning of the phrase is a bit unclear, but it evidently refers to the unreality of the times and not the unreality of “time” itself.

²⁴ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (Rosetta Books, 2000), 32.

etymologically—which always and “logically”, in the true original sense of *logos*, is first—means *con-crescere*, “growing together”, or becoming a being together with other beings, implying a manifold mutual relationship by which every existing being is part of a set of beings who exist in a particular time and place where they are in their place and at home; where they will be missing when they cease to exist, and so any destruction in the name of making things better is meaningless. Destruction and death happen, exhausted beings must be replaced, or substituted, but only if this happens. The valorisation of concreteness is the basic principle of life; the valorisation of destruction is the way of death. Modernity is a way of death.

The next point, and a most important corollary, is that therefore everything is historical. Every concrete thing that exists has its history, is what it actually is because of its own history—but which is a history that is, in line with “concrete” or *con-crescere*, is shared with many other beings, living and non-living. Being part of this history, or becoming familiar with this history, is the basic precondition for going on existing, or living. Denying historicity, or making it into an ideology through something like evolutionism, is a modernist ideology to undermine the value of concreteness and ends up justifying creative destruction.

A third point follows from the same reasoning and is part of the same (con) figuration: human life is lived in families, can only be lived in families, and so the family has primacy over every other consideration, whether smaller (individuals or their various constellations) or larger (tribes, classes, nations). Every human being is born of a father and a mother, who themselves have their fathers and mothers, and who may become fathers or mothers. In this way, a certain—in several senses of the word—*natural* historical order is created, which gives stability and solidity to every single human life and all lives taken together. Maintaining and promoting the stability of families was, and should be, a central concern of every human culture. Like everything in human life, this is not an absolute principle. As the saying goes, even the best families have their secrets. Yet the conduct of human lives and cultures, cannot be based on prioritising excesses; rather, as the saying goes again, exceptions only prove the rule.

Ancient Greek culture had a central word whose meaning nowadays has become almost unintelligible: *arrheton*, or what cannot be stated or said in words, which is extensively discussed by Kerényi. The word was connected to secrecy and

also to initiation rites, and such rites, through various indirect testimonies, also including Pompeii, had “sexual” connotations. Thus, we can safely generalise, also through anthropological testimonies and evidence in various European cultures concerning what one should not talk about, that the *arrheton* had a close connection to what is now called “sexuality”, or the “pleasures of the flesh”. This has evident and close contact with the previous point, rendering the various items in this section quite closely connected to each other: sexual acts, or certain acts which necessitate very intimate contact with another human being, but which are purely performed in order to gain personal pleasure, are bound to interfere with family life, or the foundations of any human community. Such acts therefore should not be wantonly discussed; in fact, they should not be talked about at all and, instead, require rather delicate attention. The form of this attention can be extremely varied, but the absence of any such attention inevitably leads to an irresponsible mode of existence, classically characteristic of slaves and not free human beings.

The focus on the concrete in its historical context, the concern with the family and the recognition of matters that cannot be talked about as not belonging to “everybody” also implies hostility to the way any “media” is operating. Such “media”, back to the Greek agora and the Roman forum, imply an immediate and indiscriminate mixing of people and words, and thus necessarily undermine any concreteness, personal immediacy, and historicity, replacing these with their opposite or fake. Mediating outfits cater to everybody in principle, but nobody in particular, so anything they offer can be immediately and infinitely substituted. They embody the very principle of destruction, so it is no surprise that the media are the main vehicles of modernist ideology and the darlings of such ideologues of modern progress and the Enlightenment project as Jürgen Habermas.

Central for all versions of modernist ideology, and for all media, is a full immersion in the present, and especially in an artificially generated present, without any presence, but spun by the words and images circulated ad infinitum in the various mediatory agencies. One must be tuned in all the time, never allowing a second of the “news” to slip by, which also implies that one is subjected to total control, and, in fact, in all dystopias about a would-be totalitarian world, the omnipresence of propaganda machines is fundamental. This also implies that an escape from media control is possible by pursuing the opposite strategy: instead of trying to swim on

the back of the fleeting moment, chasing the mirage of every trend, one must stick with the classics.

The classics recall the concreteness of life: they are classics because they have served their purpose, surviving the teeth of time biting into everything that exists, proving their worth. They were tested, time and again, and passed every examination with flying colours. In trusting them, therefore, one could do no wrong, while in trusting the media-spun fashions, one risks losing everything—even one's own concreteness. By clinging to the classics, by immersing oneself in the classics, in the right way, one not only familiarises oneself with what is generally accepted as classical, but one can also gain a sense of judgement that can help to raise new creations of the human mind to the level of classics. It is this sense of judgement that can be called, following Vico, a genuine critique—not the ideological tenets of a “critical theory” and not even a “critical philosophy” in the sense of Kant, as that is only the abusive extension of critique beyond its legitimate boundaries; this places the focus not on the sense and power of judgement, but on *negative* judgement in the sense of a boundaryless criticism—an obsession with being negative.

Conclusion: Guiding out of Trickster Land

Through his work, Eric Voegelin, like many others, serves as a guide in our Trickster Land:²⁵ helping us to find our way and navigate this modern world, thoroughly penetrated by various trickster logics. However, and more than most, Voegelin also offers a way out: in order to move forward, we must turn back. Such advice sounds paradoxical and, in fact, is paradoxical, but in a Trickster Land riven with absurdities, only paradoxes can help us to save ourselves. The idea of turning back, or turning around, repeats the advice of Plato to those stuck in the cave and obsessively watching projected shadows—a stunningly appropriate description of the modern voyeuristic experience of theatre, cinema, TV, video, and internet: turn around, *periagoge*, return to the light of reality. Still, such advice is radically incompatible with the modernist world vision. I have repeatedly experienced people being ready to accept my points but literally mortified when I drew the implications

²⁵ In my book, *Post-Truth Society*, seven such guides are dealt with: Hermann Broch, Lewis Hyde, Roberto Calasso, Michel Serres, Sándor Márai, Colin Thubron, and Albert Camus.

of the need to turn *back*. It is obvious that we cannot literally turn back time. But this is not the point/issue. Any historical age is a combination of several different factors, and *that* combination certainly cannot and should not be restored. But one can, and indeed must, return to those values, or ideas, or concerns, whatever general name we use for them, which those ages discovered, or cultivated, and which are still valuable. And, in *this* sense, we must turn back, away from the empty erring of the contemporary age, stimulated, more than anything else, by the media, which only live by the circulation of meaningless fluxes in their empty public arenas, or the void; back to the classics, the Classical and Renaissance ages, which still had human and humane knowledge and understanding. This was the basic advice of Voegelin: go back to Plato but also to Aristotle, and to Christianity, especially the Gospels; go back to the basic sources of human wisdom, as otherwise, we'll lose our way; in fact, we have already lost it.

Such a focus on returning can have an even more basic, and archaic, model, taken from walking, a legacy of the walking culture which gave birth to languages and which was the main source of living and learning – not for thousands but for hundreds of thousand years. It is very basic advice, which we with Agnes learned the hard way, through the thousands of kilometres we were walking in Europe:²⁶ if one has lost one's way, one must turn around and go back instead of trying to find shortcuts, as that only results in getting even more lost.

We, moderns as we are, have certainly lost our way, if we are not completely lost. So, we must turn back.

²⁶ See Agnes Horvath and Arpad Szakolczai, *Walking into the Void: A Historical Sociology and Political Anthropology of Walking* (Routledge, 2018).

From Political Religion to Second Reality: Eric Voegelin's Analyses of National Socialism

BARRY COOPER

Introduction

Modernity without Restraint is the title of volume five of Eric Voegelin's *Collected Works*, which combines *The Political Religions*, the *New Science of Politics*, and his inaugural lecture at Munich, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*. The title was taken from a passage in the *New Science* that deserves to be quoted in full:

The corrosion of Western civilization through Gnosticism is a slow process extending over a thousand years [...]. When the revolution occurred earlier, a less radical wave of Gnosticism was its carrier, and the resistance of the forces of tradition was, at the same time, more effective [...]. The English Revolution, in the seventeenth century, occurred at a time when Gnosticism had not yet undergone its radical secularization [...]. The American Revolution, though

its debate was already strongly affected by the psychology of enlightenment, also had the good fortune of coming to its close within the institutional and Christian climate of the *ancien régime*. In the French Revolution, then, the radical wave of Gnosticism was so strong that it permanently split the nation into the laicist half that based itself on the revolution and a conservative half that tried, and tries, to salvage the Christian tradition. The German Revolution, finally, in an environment without strong institutional traditions, brought for the first time into full play economic materialism, racist biology, corrupt psychology, scientism, and technological ruthlessness – in brief, modernity without restraint.¹

Voegelin here postulated a succession of revolutions characterised by an increasing component of progressivist modernity. His later arguments modified but did not repudiate this observation.

The Political Religions

The first of the texts to be discussed, *The Political Religions*, was published in Vienna in the spring of 1938, a month after the *Anschluss* that incorporated Austria into the Reich, much to the joy of most Austrians. Voegelin lost the legal right to teach, the *venia legendi*, in late April and was fired in mid-May. He made a hair-raising escape to Switzerland in mid-July and arrived in New York aboard the SS *Washington* in mid-September. During the Christmas break, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, he wrote a preface to a second edition, noting with considerable understatement that the publishing house in Vienna “did not promote its circulation”. He also wanted to respond to a highly critical letter he had received from Thomas Mann for being too analytical in his discussion, thereby giving the impression of neutrality.²

1 Eric Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, ed. with an introduction by Manfred Henningsen, Vol. 5 (University of Missouri Press, 2000), 241.

2 See Eric Voegelin, *Selected Correspondence, 1924-1949*, trans. William Petropoulos, ed. with an introduction by Jürgen Gebhardt, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol. 29 (University of Missouri Press, 2000), 203; Eric Voegelin, *The Drama of Humanity and Other Miscellaneous Papers*, ed. with an introduction by William Petropoulos and Gilbert Weiss, Vol. 32 (University of Missouri Press, 2004), 19–23.

In response, Voegelin distinguished his position from that of Mann, whom he described as a “politicizing intellectual”. So as to be “crystal clear”, he discussed the assassination of Ernst vom Rath, Third Secretary of the German Embassy in Paris, by Herschel Grynszpan. Voegelin argued that the National Socialist regime had placed Jews “outside the community of law”, which was necessarily reciprocal: such an individual “has no legal obligation to the individual who excludes him”. Accordingly, he cannot be legally condemned for anything he did to the one who refused to enter a legal relationship with him. Yet, was not the intentional destruction of another human being in principle immoral so that homicide must be condemned on ethical grounds? Voegelin said the ethical issue was not straightforward because “at present the National Socialist regime treats Jews not as persons but as things”, which was self-evidently evil. Such Nazi action was clear by the overwhelming number of acts of destruction of Jewish life, liberty, dignity, and property, including trafficking in Jewish lives for foreign money. In short, “a person who is robbed, spat upon, and sold is morally obliged to put an end to such actions—if necessary, by murder”. Accordingly, a Jew who killed a National Socialist “would not only be excusable, it would be a duty”.³ By shooting vom Rath, Grynszpan did his duty by destroying an agent of evil. Voegelin’s interpretation of Grynszpan’s action was controversial, particularly considering the Nazi response, *Kristallnacht*. But does anyone seriously maintain that if Grynszpan had *not* killed vom Rath, the Nazis would have cancelled the *Kristallnacht* pogrom? Voegelin summarised his commonsensical criticism of Mann as resulting from Mann’s failure to understand that Nazism too constituted a world of meaning, that it too was a political religion—but an evil one.

The first generalisation one can make, as Manfred Henningsen noted in his editor’s introduction to volume V,⁴ is that all three books emphasised the importance of Germany—directly with the Nazis in *The Political Religions*, as the vanguard of Western progressivism in *The New Science of Politics*, and the development of German philosophy in *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*. A second generalisation: in his 1936 book on Austria, Voegelin noted the “nonexistence of a political people, a *demos*, that could have established the state as a democracy”.⁵ Germany likewise lacked a *demos*

3 Voegelin, *The Drama of Humanity*, 19–23.

4 Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 1–3.

5 Eric Voegelin, *The Authoritarian State*, in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, trans. Ruth Hein, ed. with an introduction by Gilbert Weiss, Vol. 4 (University of Missouri Press, 1999), 151, 157, 241.

but found a substitute, as Voegelin analysed in his two race books of 1933, namely a *Volk*. In place of an Austrian *demos*, Voegelin argued that the authoritarian Austrian state shaped the Austrian population as a body politic capable of action in history; in Nazi Germany, this task was performed by the Führer—who after the *Anschluss* took on the job for Austria as well. Even before considering Voegelin's argument in *The Political Religions*, the title of his book suggests a third generalisation: the success of Nazi Germany in organising the Reich for historical action was somehow connected to its ability to combine pragmatic political events, such as re-militarising the Rhineland or successfully annexing Austria, with “religious” motivations, whatever he may have meant by that term. That is why the first chapter of *The Political Religions*, dealing with “The Problem”, was divided into “State” and “Religion”.

The “problem” concerned the issue of discussing contemporary political movements as also religious movements. The “attentive observer”, Voegelin said, will necessarily look at the factual situation that way. Most commentators, however, did not deal with both political and religious elements because of a conventional dissociation of political religion into some things that pertained to the Church and others to the state, as if these two entities were not infused with the same spirit (*Geist*), namely secularism. Any adequate understanding of political religion, therefore, would have to question this dissociation. This meant “religion” referred not merely to the great and familiar redemptive religions but also to “all other phenomena accompanying the development of states” that were of a religious nature. It also meant questioning whether “the concept [*Begriff*] of the state really is limited to secular human organizational relationships that do not have any relation to the sphere of the religious”.⁶

To illustrate the problem, Voegelin first analysed what seemed to be a standard Weberian notion of the state as an organisation with “an original [or primordial] power to rule [*ursprünglicher Herrschermacht*]”⁷ over a sedentary body of human beings. Sedentism is one thing, Voegelin said, but where did this “primordial” power come from? “Primordial” here meant that it must have come only from the existence

of the state and was therefore underived from any state-transcendent source. The chief difficulty with such a conventional assertion, Voegelin stated, is that it is false. Such an “primordial” power would be unlimited, but all states are limited either by internal norms or by other states.

More importantly, the “order of creation” is simply excluded, and with that exclusion, the source of creation, God, is excluded as well. Accordingly, the “divine head”, the “world-transcendent God”, is decapitated and replaced by the state as the source (*Ursprung*) of its own existence. Voegelin then named Hegel as the contemporary source of this assertion: the people, organised as a state, constituted the immediate reality of the spirit (*Geist*) “and, consequently, the absolute power on earth”, without any “internal barriers”, especially those derived from individual opinion and reason. “The spirit [*Geist*] that has become the state” sustains the use of violence to preserve itself”.⁸ By this argument, Voegelin indicated the intellectual source of his “deep aversion against any kind of political collectivism”, noted earlier, namely Hegel.⁹ The point he wished to make, however, did not concern Hegel so much as what may be called, provisionally, the Hegelian state that treated human beings “mechanically”, on the one hand, but also as constituents of the “only true reality”, on the other. In other words, the state appropriated the spiritual reality of individual human beings and turned them into constituent elements of a collective suprahuman reality. Thus, Voegelin said, “[W]e are caught in the innermost part of a religions experience, and our words describe a mystical process”.¹⁰

A final paragraph described the relations of natural spirits, organised and manifest as states, with one another “and the prevailing *Weltgeist*”. The historical rise and fall of states reflect the “world court of Judgement of the Spirit”, where all national spirits are condemned to death after they have served their time. The effect on individuals or on states is obvious: “[F]aced with the reality of the state, people sink down into the impersonal nothingness of their instrumentality; and faced with the reality of the world spirit, people and states do the same”. Two aspects of this mystical process remained equally surprising: first, that the imperial world-ordering reason of

⁸ Voegelin, *Die Politischen Religionen*, 14; Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 29.

⁹ This was hardly his last word on Hegel. See *Published Essays, 1966-1985*, in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, ed. with an introduction by Ellis Sandoz, Vol. 7 (University of Missouri Press, 1990), 213–55.

¹⁰ Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 30.

⁶ Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 28. The German text, which we also consulted, is available, along with a translation by T. J. DiNapoli and E. E. Easterly III with an introduction by Barry Cooper, as Eric Voegelin, *Political Religions*, Toronto Studies in Theology, 33 (Edwin Mellen, 1986).

⁷ Voegelin, *Die Politischen Religionen*, 12; Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 28

Hegelian speculation “forces history into the revelation of the spirit”, and second, the lack of awareness of the “deep problem of theodicy, *i.e.*, that the world spirit has no other means at its disposal besides blood and the misery of mankind”. Thus, the entire Hegelian system was erected over “an abyss [*Abgrund*] of human nihilism and torn by the desire for fulfilment in reality through [*durch*] a collective body”.¹¹

Given the implications Voegelin drew regarding this collectivist account of the Hegelian state, it was no surprise that his account of the place of religion in the contemporary world was proportionately diminished. Human beings, Voegelin argued, experience themselves as “creatures [*als kreatürlich*]” and this experience was a source of anxiety: “states of excitation arise that are often inadequately referred to as emotions”. These “innermost emotions” were not just psychological agitations but primal events at the bottom of one’s soul: “All the states of agitation arising from the condition of creatureliness can be variously colored by anxiety, hope, despair, bliss, peacefulness, searching restlessness, indignation, rebelliousness, humbleness, and so on”.¹² These “agitations of creatureliness” found fulfilment and deliverance in many different areas of Being: in the body and the spirit, in community and nature, and in God. One way or another, a specific reality would be identified as fundamental and thus sacred. “It becomes the most real, a *realissimum*” that is often identified as divine. “Worlds of symbols, linguistic signs and concepts arrange themselves around the sacred center; they firm up as systems, become filled with the spirit of religious agitation and are fanatically defended as the ‘right’ order of being”, of which there were currently many competing versions but for which a common language to describe them did not exist. Voegelin proposed, therefore, a “linguistic distinction. The spiritual religions, which find the *realissimum* in the Ground of the world (*Weltgrund*), should be called world-transcendent religions (*überweltliche Religionen*); and all others, *i.e.*, those that find the divine in the partial contents of the world, should be called inner-worldly [or world-immanent] religions (*innerweltliche Religionen*)”.¹³ With this conceptual distinction secure, Voegelin returned “to the humans who seek and find”, or, to use his later language, to the question of human consciousness.

¹¹ Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 30.

¹² Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 30–1.

¹³ Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 32–3.

When humans are sensitive and their minds perceptive, “one look at the world will suffice to see the misery of the human creature [*Kreatur*] and to guess the ways of salvation; when they are insensitive and dull, massive impressions will be needed to trigger even some weak feeling”.¹⁴ Some saw suffering as the essence of creatureliness and sought deliverance in the *Weltgrund*; others saw suffering as a grievance to be actively remedied. “Some souls react more strongly to the inadequacies of the world, some to the magnificence of the creation”. Some saw the Beyond only in the visage of powerful human beings “accompanied by glamour and noise”. For others, the face and gestures of every person, letting his solitude with God shine through. And wide is the area from which ecstasies arise in the soul, the experiences in which humans transcend their existence: from the *unio mystica* of the spirit to the exaltation in the celebration of community; to the devotion to the brotherhood of companions; to the loving extension of oneself into the landscape, the plants, and the animals; up to instinctive convulsions in the sexual act and in bloodlust.¹⁵ Historically, these “ecstasies” have arisen from the time of the “oldest political religion” of a civilised people, which at the time meant the Egyptians. Thus began Voegelin’s presentation of the evidence regarding political religions.

We shall ignore Voegelin’s discussion of what he would later call the efforts of Akhenaton’s compact cosmological consciousness to symbolise its experience of striving towards transcendence, along with the subsequent symbolisations of hierarchy, *ecclesia* (Voegelin’s term for “the sacral community substance”), the distinction between spiritual and temporal, and the apocalyptic efforts of the late Middle Ages to renew Christian existence within, but not of, the world. The last effort failed so that the intramundane world became the sole venue for human perfection. At the same time, the “Western *ecclesia*” fragmented into political units that are independent of, and closed against, one another. Voegelin described this process in detail in his later eight-volume *History of Political Ideas* and, as in *The New Science of Politics*, pointed to Hobbes as the “great theologian” of this historical process. Hobbes’s greatest achievement, *Leviathan*, described an omnipotent state immediately under God that operated according to divine orders. Since Hobbes’s day, Voegelin said, “nothing essential has changed” in European politico-religious symbolism. An

¹⁴ Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 33.

¹⁵ Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 33.

ordered hierarchy, universal and particular ranks of authority (ecclesia), empires of God and of Satan, and the cult of the leader and his apocalyptic actions “remain the expressive forms of the [world-immanent] community religion up until today”.¹⁶

Equally important, the intramundane “world” as “contents” became the sole focus of human investigation, curiosity, and activity. The world as “existence”, as a contingent being that might not be, correspondingly disappeared from human consciousness. The reason for the attenuation of any concern with the existence of the world should be obvious: raising such a question presupposed its non-existence, which in turn introduced the problem of a (non-existent) creator of the existing world. In the language Voegelin used at the time, which relied on Schelling, not Leibniz,¹⁷ the question of theodicy disappeared from human consciousness. What took its place were the “methods of science as the sole form to study the contents of the world”. Only these were legitimate, indeed “obligatory”.¹⁸ Metaphysics, religion, and mystical thought were dismissed before the claims of secular science, which became the only valid form of cognition.

The results are daily familiar to contemporary human beings. The contents of the world can expand to such an extent that the creator of the world, God, disappears. However, Voegelin declared, this event “cannot annul the human condition itself”. Instead, “when God is invisible behind the world, the contents of the world become new gods”. The symbols of world-transcendence may disappear, but new ones are created “from the world-immanent language of science” to take the place of the now-absent ones. “Like the Christian *ecclesia*, the world-immanent community has its apocalypse, too; yet the new apocalypses insist that the symbols they create are scientific judgements”.¹⁹ Voegelin then listed examples starting with the Kantian cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment, followed by the narrowing particularism of Fichte, Comte, Marx, and Gobineau. Within this course of European history,

¹⁶ Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 59.

¹⁷ In Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, trans. ed. and with an introduction by Detlev Clemens and Brendan Purcell, Vol. 31 (University of Missouri Press, 1999), 86, Voegelin identified Leibniz as the source of the two “metaphysical questions”: “Why is there something rather than nothing?” and “Why is it the way it is and not some other way?” In “Science, Politics and Gnosticism,” in *Modernity without Restraint*, Voegelin noted that Heidegger was concerned only with the first question, which accounted for the specific deformation of his philosophy. See Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 275–7.

¹⁸ Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 60.

¹⁹ Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 60.

successive revelations, starting with Hobbes, have been accompanied by evocations of new Satans—the Roman Catholic Church (Hobbes), human desires (Kant), Napoleon (Fichte), religion and metaphysics (Comte), the bourgeoisie (Marx), and the “counter race” of the Jews (Gobineau).

And to repeat: all this Satanic evocation has been in the name of science and of the scientific method. The two most prominent “sciences” bequeathed from the nineteenth to the twentieth century have been historical science, sometimes called “scientific socialism” and always identified with Marx and his successors, and race science. Of course, the latter temporarily fell out of favour at the end of the Second World War, but as anyone who has lived through the COVID-19 event knows, it has been replaced with individual medical science, on the one hand, and collectivist environmental science, on the other. Obviously, Voegelin did not discuss these contemporary developments. He did, however, discuss the infusion of religious fervour into race science that lives on in its successors. In his words: “As a consequence of the pragmatic elements of the world-immanent faith, people following this type of religion will not allow their faith to be disrupted even though they know about the psychological techniques used for creating myths, the propaganda of the myths, and the means of social dissemination”.²⁰

Voegelin contextualised these pragmatic consequences with reference again to Hegel’s “mechanical” collectivism. As for the individual human beings who served as the “contents of the world”, once they assumed the attitude of “world-immanent religiosity”, and viewed themselves as a “tool”, they would voluntarily submit to “the technical means by which they are integrated into the organization of the collectivity”. Such submission is “the lifeblood of the world-immanent God himself”, rather than a crime “against the dignity of the person”.²¹ After the war, Hannah Arendt provided many examples of what even Voegelin could not have imagined. For example, members of the SS, which was surely an organisation that subordinated the dignity of the person to realising the religious-ecstatic ties between the *Volk* and the *Führer*, often did not care if they lived or died.²²

²⁰ Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 63.

²¹ Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 64.

²² Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), 435–7, 441–3, 446–8, 454, 459.

Beneath the symbolism expressing world-immanent religiosity lay the experiences—“the original sources, to the forces that created the symbolic forms”, the “movements of the soul” that sustained the “world-immanent community”. As Voegelin argued in the opening chapter, the experience of “creaturely abandonment” (*kreatürliche Verlassenheit*) and isolated loneliness (which Arendt also noted after the war) created a demand for redemption not by God but by “the people and the sworn brotherhood of comrades”.²³ Voegelin then used Gerhard Schumann’s *Lieder vom Reich* as an illustration,²⁴ but the process of creating a packed mass of comrades exists in many other forms, from union solidarity to Coke advertisements, “we are the world”, to the latest pro-Hamas, anti-Semitic encampments and demonstrations on university quads. One way or another, “the soul is united with the fraternal flow of the world”—one is tempted to add, the flow from the river to the sea. Moreover, the point of such activity is the action itself, not “victory”, which would bring an end to the deed (*die Tat*). As Arendt would say, the *movement* was exhilarating, not what, if anything, it accomplished. Likewise, spiking trees in the forests of British Columbia or torching logging equipment, not preserving the habitat of a small owl or newt, is the source of environmentalists’ ecstasy. Or, to use a less esoteric example, throwing tomato soup on Van Gogh’s “Sunflowers” induced the same ecstatic results in Just Stop Oil activists. As Voegelin put it: “[F]or these actors, marked by the struggle, the new world after victory is hollow and dull”.²⁵

In the Epilogue, Voegelin drew several conclusions. The first, which still pertains to the children of race science and historical science, the activist protesters in such contemporary movements as environmentalism or D.E.I., is that “the life of people in political community cannot be defined as a profane realm, in which we are concerned only with legal questions and the organization of power;” it is also a “religious order”. Accordingly, political science would be “incomplete” if it didn’t take religious forces and their symbols into account or, worse, if it tried to reduce them to “areligious categories”. All human beings, not only those of Central

Europe, live in a political regime “with all traits of their being, from the physical to the spiritual and religious traits”.²⁶

Voegelin ended *The Political Religions* with a straightforward declaration: “Neither [philosophical] knowledge nor a Christian decision can solve the mystery of God and being. God’s creation contains evil, and the splendour of Being is clouded by the misery of creatures. The order of the community is built upon hate and blood, along with misery and apostasy from God”.²⁷ For Voegelin in 1938 and 1939, these issues expressed with an obvious urgency that this refugee in America understood deeply what was at stake: “the question of theodicy”, of vindicating God’s ways to humans.

Hitler and the Germans

The second of Voegelin’s texts to consider is his 1964 lectures delivered in the *Kleine Aula* at *Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität* in Munich. The editors of the English version note, quite correctly, that they comprised “the most spectacular course” in the Faculty of Arts given during the summer semester.²⁸ Their importance may remind readers of Max Weber’s lectures, “Politics and a Vocation” and “Science as a Vocation”, delivered at the same venue nearly half a century earlier.²⁹ The editors are also correct to note that the lectures were the peak of his work as a political scientist in Germany, largely because of the subject matter he discussed. It was both Voegelin’s most detailed and profound analysis of the spiritual level of German intellectual life and an analysis of the complicity of Germans in Nazi rule. The latter question was reflected in the postwar discussions of what his contemporaries called “mastering the past”, a lovely German word, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Among other things, Voegelin argued that this term was a cliché that obscured the real problem: mastering the postwar present by coming to terms with the Nazi past.

There are some continuities with *The Political Religions*, notably a concern with Hegelian collectivism and the role of the “state”, that is, the Federal Republic. By shouldering responsibility for the atrocities of the Third Reich and paying

²³ Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 67.

²⁴ Schumann joined the Nazi Party in 1930, then the SA and Nazi Student League. He was instrumental in the Nazification (*Gleichschaltung*) of the University of Tübingen in 1933. He later considered himself a “knight of the holy grail of German culture” and ended his career as an SS-Obersturmführer.

²⁵ Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 69.

²⁶ Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 70.

²⁷ Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 71.

²⁸ Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 1. We also consulted the German edition, *Hitler und die Deutschen*, ed. Manfred Henningsen (Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2006).

²⁹ Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 56.

compensation to both individual victims and to the new state of Israel, the “state” was able both to define itself as the opposite of the Satanic Reich and to make an end run around the inability or unwillingness of German citizens to accept their individual responsibility for their support of the Nazi regime. This move was expressed in another cliché, “collective guilt”, which allowed individual Germans to avoid through forgetfulness anything redolent of individual responsibility.³⁰ But, as Voegelin said, “a collective guilt does not exist, especially not at the personal level, for guilt is always something that can be attributed to a person”.³¹ Moreover, individual Germans could hide behind the smokescreen of collective guilt even while being fully aware of the continuities in personnel between the Reich and the Federal Republic in the bureaucracy, the law, the economy, and the universities.

A second and obvious continuity with *The Political Religions* was a reiteration of the commonsensical observation that “what a crime is can never be inferred from the legal order; rather, it comes from ethics in general”. Accordingly, what constitutes a crime in an ethical sense “can also be classified as a crime by criminal law, but criminal law is not the source for understanding what a crime is”. Thus, the functioning of criminal law “depends on the society as a whole being intact, and not criminal”, which means that criminal law assumes the existence of a non-criminal society. On the other hand, “if the society as a whole commits crimes, there is indeed no one who could be a criminal lawyer, because he himself would participate in this crime and in the criminal attitude”.³² Voegelin was referring to the German legal regime, but the same observation can be made of the Anglo-American quasi-common-law regime. Specifically, “if the society functions of its own accord, laws to protect fundamental rights are not needed. That such laws are formulated at all always indicates that a very serious state of degeneration already exists, which such formulations are designed to guard against”.³³ To give a contemporary example, when the executive invokes an “environmental crisis” or a “pandemic crisis” to relieve themselves of legal obligations and restraints, then that is evidence that “the entire moral order” has come to an end.³⁴

One final preliminary observation: for Voegelin’s students, one of the most enjoyable aspects of his lectures (as many of them have said) was the way in which he demolished the conventional imagery of the personnel of the Third Reich, especially Hitler, and especially the way Hitler was portrayed by the intellectuals who dominated the postwar discussion of him and of the Nazi regime. The conventional image of Hitler was of a mysterious but overwhelming and dominant personality. This was also a cliché. By painting a picture of a demonic enigma, the conventional intellectuals indicated there was literally nothing to understand. Hitler was simply inexplicable. In fact, however, the problem was that the honoured and respectable intellectuals who discussed Hitler either ignored or were simply ignorant of the large number of scholarly discussions of Hitler and of the analytical vocabulary required to provide a coherent discussion. Voegelin mentioned such standard contemporary works as Alan Bullock’s *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (1952; German edition, 1959) or Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1952). Voegelin also had in mind the classic accounts of politics and tyranny found in Plato and Aristotle. One might add that the conventional interpretations also ignored such primary sources as Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* and Leni Riefenstahl’s film *Triumph of the Will* (1935).

The structure of the lectures was straightforward. First was an analysis of the spiritual type of Germans who brought Hitler to power—namely the petit bourgeoisie, educated philistines, intellectually decadent elites, and so on. Second came an analysis of the Germans who did not support Hitler, “men and works of spiritual rank”. Here, he included a lecture on Max Weber, who died well before Hitler took office but whose intellectual integrity and scientific vigour Voegelin admired. He also mentioned Thomas Mann, Goethe, and Novalis, the oral discussions of whom were not transcribed, and Robert Musil and Heimito von Doderer, whom he discussed in some detail.³⁵ The first part, described as the “descent into the abyss”, was preceded by a discussion of several “diagnostic tools” by which the descent could be described. The second part, “toward a restoration of order”, was not so much a “solution” to the “problem” of such a descent as a more profound analysis of it.

The basic issue discussed in the lectures, which was previously described in terms of Hegelian collectivism, was called “the problem of dehumanization”, whereby

³⁰ This problem was raised in 1946 by Karl Jaspers and was subjected to a critical analysis similar to Voegelin’s. See Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, trans. E. B. Ashton (Capricorn, 1947).

³¹ Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 75.

³² Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 226.

³³ Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 230.

³⁴ Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 231.

³⁵ Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 184.

human beings became insignificant compared to their membership in a collectivity—what we call today “identity politics”, where what counts is not one’s humanity and one’s relation to God but the collectivity with which one “identifies”. Dehumanisation was invariably accompanied by a claim to humanity for oneself, as part of a special collectivity, but not for others—say Jews or Communists, for example—who are excluded from humanity and are available to be killed. But the claim for such privileges also degraded the claimant and “there is no protection from the state against that”.³⁶

The same problem was expressed in Voegelin’s title, “Hitler and the Germans”, and not, for example, “On National Socialism”. To see how radical Voegelin intended his title to be, imagine a study of the war in the Middle East called “ Hamas and the Palestinians”. The crux of the problem was illustrated by the conventional observation that if Hitler was “stupid and criminal” and yet Germans strongly supported him, “then they too must have been stupid and criminal. But that is not possible, so Hitler was not stupid and no criminal”.³⁷

The concept of stupidity was one of the “diagnostic tools” mentioned above. For Voegelin, the term did not just mean having a “dim wit”, as Robert Musil, from whom Voegelin borrowed the concept, argued.³⁸ Rather, it meant “that a man, because of his loss of reality, is not in a position rightly to orient his action in the world in which he lives”.³⁹ It was not, therefore, a petite-bourgeois term of abuse but a technical term “for the analysis of a spiritual structure”.⁴⁰ Here, Voegelin distinguished between simple and intelligent stupidity. Concretely, stupidity depended on the structure of society. In some societies, for example, the simple stupidity of individuals turned out to be a kind of benign decency since the surrounding society was pretty much in order. But when society was disordered, the simply stupid could become politically effective or socially dominant and wreck society as a whole because of their lack of self-control—that is, because of their stupidity.⁴¹

³⁶ Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 228.

³⁷ Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 56.

³⁸ See Robert Musil, “On Stupidity,” in his *Precision and Soul: Essays and Addresses*, ed. and trans. Burton Pike and David S. Luft (University of Chicago Press, 1990), 268–86.

³⁹ Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 89.

⁴⁰ Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 152.

⁴¹ In Canada, for example, the response by the Government of Canada to the truckers’ convoy to Ottawa, namely the declaration of the Emergencies Act, was an egregious example of stupidity. It was later ruled unconstitutional.

Systematically, the higher or intelligent stupidity starts from the loss of the experience of a sector of reality, usually by way of dehumanisation and dedivinisation. Under such circumstances, the human relationship with God, the human presence under divine being, is lost and is replaced, as in *The Political Religions*, by human will in the sense of *libido* rather than a rationally ordered *voluntas*. Under these circumstances, human beings may have lost their reason and spirit, which connected them to reality and helped order their existence, but they did not cease being human. Rather, such persons were simply disordered or diseased, or, using a term he said he borrowed from Schelling, they became “pneumopathological” humans.

Such a human being’s image of reality, therefore, although defective, has not lost the form of reality—that is, he is still a human, with the full claim to make statements of order, even when the ordering force or orientation towards divine being has become lost—even then—except that he puts a pseudo-order in place of the real order. So, reality and experience of reality are replaced by a false image of reality, which claims, however, to be the genuine reality. There are, then, if this pneumopathic condition has occurred, two realities: the first reality, where the normally ordered human lives, and the second reality, in which the pneumatically disturbed human now lives and which thus comes into constant conflict with the first reality.⁴²

For example, a human being could easily enough live in a second reality such as the aforementioned environmental and pandemic crises where what he imagined takes the place of reality. From his experience of this imaginary second reality, “it follows that he is justified in saying stupid stuff [*Zeug*] about religious questions [and not just religious questions]. So, if I imagine things that are stupid enough, then I am justified for everything that follows as a result of my stupidity”.⁴³ In practice, the result is that the pneumopath lives “the lie”.⁴⁴ This way of living is “indispensable” because “the second reality claims to be true, and since it constantly comes into conflict with the first reality, it is necessary to lie constantly: for example, one holds that the first reality is quite different from what it actually is, or that the second reality is most horribly misunderstood”. There is, therefore, friction

⁴² Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 108.

⁴³ Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 129.

⁴⁴ Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 108–9.

between the first and second reality, and in this context, the lie is meant to be a verbal means of eliminating the friction. The problem, of course, as Solzhenitsyn pointed out in his famous “Letter to the Soviet Leaders”, is that “[e]verything is steeped in lies and *everybody knows it*” (italics in the original).⁴⁵ Moreover, because the second reality does not exist, yet the person who lives the lie pretends that it does, such an individual can be properly described as a “degenerate” type. In the example Voegelin used, Generals Jodl and Keitel sat with Hitler over dinner and transmitted his orders in 1945, knowing full well that the war was lost. Their conduct led directly to many more deaths of combatants and civilians.⁴⁶ One can think of contemporary examples without much trouble.

Let me note one final consequence of stupidity, namely that, having lost experiences of certain sectors of reality, the individual also lacks the language appropriate to characterise those experiences.⁴⁷ In *Hitler and the Germans*, Voegelin called this phenomenon “illiteracy” or “spiritual illiteracy”.⁴⁸ Such individuals could read and write but were apparently incapable of understanding problems of reason, spirit, or justice. Such problems highlight the obvious alternative: “[P]erhaps a very great number of Germans, perhaps the overwhelming majority, were in fact extraordinarily stupid, that in political matters a very great number still are, and that what we see here is a situation of intellectual and ethical rottenness, which in fact supported the rise of the phenomenon of Hitler”.⁴⁹ This, Voegelin said, is not just a German problem; “[i]t is an international problem”. It clearly is a Canadian problem. In other words, if a society “chooses criminal imbeciles and crooks as representatives, their society as a whole is in a very unpleasant situation, because those who were not prepared to elect criminal imbeciles and crooks as their representatives are still caught together and hanged together”.⁵⁰ The use of the term “representative” in this context was called “elemental” in *The New Science of Politics*.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Letter to the Soviet Leaders*, trans. H. Sternberg (Harper and Row, 1975), 46. Hence, Vaclav Havel’s famous story of the grocer in “The Power of the Powerless,” who put a sign in his shop window, “Workers of the World, Unite!”

⁴⁶ Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 231.

⁴⁷ Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 90.

⁴⁸ Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 97.

⁴⁹ Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 56–7.

⁵⁰ Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 76.

⁵¹ Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, 112ff.

and referred to the “articulation” of a society that produces a representative capable of acting historically on behalf of that society.⁵² Certainly, an imbecilic society can be moved to action by imbecilic leaders.

Conclusion

Let us summarise Voegelin’s analysis in the aspects of these two works we have considered. First, political movements need to be considered as religious as much as political phenomena. Second is the distinction between spiritual religions that establish the *realissimum* in the world-transcendent Ground and world-immanent religions that find the divine in one or another aspect of the world. Third, the major perversion of world-immanent political religions is that they present themselves to the world not as a creature of faith unconnected to reason but as products of science. Fourth, one consequence of claiming scientific status is a loss of intelligibility, manifest most clearly in the loss of linguistic coherence, which Voegelin (and Musil) called “stupidity”, *Dummheit*.

Finally, consider the title of this conference, “Why Philosophize? To Recapture Reality!” It is taken from Chapter 22 of Voegelin’s *Autobiographical Reflections*. There, among other things, he discussed the problem of “recapturing” reality in conceptual language by way of critical analysis of the conventional language of politics—or today, of ideology. Despite the differences in analytical language, both books discussed here exemplify what Voegelin had in mind.

⁵² Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 79; cf. *Modernity without Restraint*, 117–24.

Faith and Reason in Post-Metaphysical Thought

LEE TREPANIER

The relationship between faith and reason reemerged in academic and public discourse in 2019 when Jürgen Habermas acknowledged in *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie* the contributions of religion to liberalism in his vision of post-metaphysical thought.¹ This vision was the culmination of Habermas's previous writings at the turn of the century about a "post-secular" society where religion offered "important resources of spiritual explanation"² and "articulations of moral sensitivities and solidaristic intuitions, especially regarding vulnerable domains of social life".³ Habermas hoped that a post-secular society could discover a cooperative truth that translated moral concepts "out of the religious idioms into a universally accessible language", i.e., communicative reason.⁴

¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie*, Vol. 1: *Die okzidentale Konstellation von Glauben und Wissen*; Vol. 2: *Vernünftige Freiheit: Spuren des Diskurses über Glauben und Wissen* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 2019). See also Giorgi Areshidze, "Taking Religion Seriously? Habermas on Religious Translation and Cooperative Learning in Post-Secular Society," *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 4 (2017), 724–37.

² Jürgen Habermas, "Faith and Knowledge," in *The Frankfurt School on Religion*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Routledge, 2005), 327–38.

³ Jürgen Habermas, *Europe: A Faltering Project* (Polity Press, 2009), 76–77.

⁴ Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *The Holberg Prize Seminar Report*, <http://www.holbergprisen.no/en/juergen-habermas/holberg-prize-symposium-2005.html> (Last accessed: 31 December 2024).

According to Habermas, post-metaphysical thinking was to recover for contemporary thought the insights of the Axial Age (800–200 BC), when the world's major religions of Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism, as well as Greek philosophy, had emerged. Among the ideas of this Age were the equal worth of all individuals and an objective and impartial standard of justice. Throughout Western thought, these ideas were clarified and purged of their metaphysical and theological aspects for “communicative reason”: a rationality committed to values of objectivity, impartial justice, human equality, and historical progress.

Like Habermas, both Eric Voegelin and Leo Strauss wrestled with the relationship between faith and reason. Although arriving at different conclusions about this relationship, both thinkers would reject Habermas's post-metaphysical thought that reason was the ultimate manifestation of human morality on which normative judgement rested. But before delving into their differences with Habermas, we first need to reexamine how both Voegelin and Strauss understood faith and reason and then how their divergent accounts informed their disagreements with Habermas.

Scientism and Gnosticism

The 1993 publication of *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence Between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934–1964*, translated and edited by Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper, not only provided insight into the relationship between these two thinkers about their views on faith and reason but also produced numerous commentaries.⁵ For example, Thomas L. Pangle emphasised that both Voegelin and Strauss understood the problem of modernity in the same way: a distortion of fundamental moral and religious experiences with modern science and philosophy acting as “a veil between the mind and a clear view of itself and its own experiences”.⁶

⁵ Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper, eds., *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence Between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin* (University of Missouri Press, 1993). See also Emmanuel Patard, “Supplement and Corrections to ‘The Strauss-Voegelin’ Correspondence,” *The Political Science Reviewer* 34 (2005), 143–88; Steven J. Lenzner, “Leo Strauss and His Contemporaries,” *The Political Science Reviewer* 22 (1993), 124–56.

⁶ Thomas L. Pangle, “On the Epistolary Dialogue between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin,” *The Review of Politics* 53, no. 1 (Winter 1991), 101.

The result was the twentieth-century political catastrophes of National Socialism and communism. Likewise, Ernest L. Fortin, Glenn Hughes, and James M. Rhodes concurred with Pangle regarding Voegelin's and Strauss's motivations and diagnosis of modernity.⁷

But upon closer examination, Voegelin and Strauss understood modernity differently because of the divergence in how they viewed the relationship between faith and reason. For Voegelin, the Christian faith was fundamentally one of uncertainty, thereby transporting the source of its theological and metaphysical meaning beyond temporal reality:

Uncertainty is the very essence of Christianity. The feeling of security in a “world full of gods” is lost with the god themselves; when the world is de-divinized, communication with the world-transcendent God is reduced to the tenuous bond of faith, in the sense of Heb. 11:1, as the substance of things hoped for and the proof of things unseen.⁸

This balance between the expectation of a spiritual transformation promised by Christianity in the afterlife and the realisation of earthly existence that would remain forever imperfect was achieved by Augustine in the construction of the two cities of God and man. This balance would be disrupted by such figures as the twelfth-century Joachim of Flora, who replaced the uncertainty of existence with unquestioned knowledge about human destiny. However, this balance would be restored because the Christian experience of faith and knowledge still resided in society's institutions and culture. But by the time of the Enlightenment, reason and natural science had displaced Christianity in Western institutions, culture, and as a source of knowledge. The twentieth-century manifestation of this displacement was known as scientism.⁹

⁷ Ernest L. Fortin and Glenn Hughes, “The Strauss-Voegelin Correspondence: Two Reflections and Two Comments,” *The Review of Politics* 56, no. 2 (Spring 1994), 345–46, 352–53; James M. Rhodes, “Philosophy, Revelation, and Political Theory: Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin,” *The Journal of Politics* 49, no. 4 (1987), 1036–37.

⁸ Eric Voegelin, *The Science of Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 1987), 122.

⁹ For more about this account, see Eric Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas, Vol. 6, Revolution and the New Science* (University of Missouri Press, 1998).

For Voegelin, scientism was the ideology that facts can be distinguished from values: facts were derived from scientific methods, while values were products of subjective prejudice and opinion.¹⁰ The origins of scientism started with Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum*, in which he outlined a method that could be applied to all human knowledge.¹¹ Suggesting that society could advance through science, Bacon called for the fusion of political power and science in his *New Atlantis*, with humans being able to subdue nature, but only after they had first studied and understood it. Although previous thinkers have sought a synthesis of science and power, Bacon stood out as one of the first modern thinkers because of his refusal to name a teleological end for science.

However, the scientific method and its influence on human understanding of the world did not become prevalent until the time of Newton with his notion of absolute space. This concept has important philosophical and political consequences, as Voegelin remarked: "[T]he attribution of 'absoluteness' to the new science expresses the will of finding an absolute orientation of human existence through intramundane experience, and the correlate to this new will is the unwillingness to orient existence through openness towards transcendental reality".¹² The postulating of absolute space within the temporal-material realm as the sole orientation point of human existence precluded the reality of transcendence for human beings.

Science consequently was defined as knowledge that resided only in the temporal-material realm and, as joined with political power, focused on utilitarian considerations of wealth and technology. Science thus became reduced to a materialist and temporal process that promoted practical utility. The influence of this new type of science was "expanding in our civilization so strongly that the social realization of other values is noticeably weak".¹³ The social and political environment became governed by the scientific principles of rationality and utility, and its adherents expressed a dogmatic faith in the power of science, as Voegelin noted, "Science becomes an idol that will magically cure the evils of existence and transform the nature of man."¹⁴

¹⁰ Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, 194.

¹¹ Howard White, "Francis Bacon," in Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, eds., *History of Political Philosophy* (University of Chicago Press, 1973), 343.

¹² Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, 210.

¹³ Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, 207.

¹⁴ Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, 208.

Scientism as applied to both science and society is a type of Gnosticism for Voegelin. According to Voegelin, a Gnostic was someone who claimed absolute certain knowledge of the fundamental principles of reality, thereby committing the error that humans ultimately could understand the mystery of being. Gnostic movements, whether ancient or modern, were characterised by a Manichean obsession with a temporal evil that can be blamed on social disorganisation rather than on a condition of human beings, i.e., original sin, and a conviction that salvation from the evils of existence could be achieved in one's lifetime through a historical process dictated by human action, i.e., historical agents who possessed *gnosis* (certain knowledge) to guide correct action.¹⁵

Gnosticism contains certain characteristics: 1. The feeling of dissatisfaction with humans' place in the world; 2. The belief that this dissatisfaction was a result of the world being poorly organised; 3. The belief that salvation from the evil of the world was possible; 4. The belief that the order of being would have to be changed in a historical process; 5. The belief that a change in the order of being would be possible through human action; and 6. The belief that one can possess this type of knowledge, *gnosis*, and therefore should encourage other human beings into action in order to change the order of being.¹⁶

The cause of modernity for Voegelin, therefore, was a constant impulse in human nature to know all of reality in order to recreate it into his or her own image, disregarding the limits of human nature to realise one's utopian ideals into political reality. The desire to pursue this for Voegelin violated his belief that human beings would always have an incomplete understanding of reality and therefore any attempt to claim and recreate reality *en total* would fail. This did not mean reform and progress could not be achieved, but such actions must be understood in light of Augustine's two cities: temporal achievement cannot be mistaken for spiritual salvation.¹⁷ Thus, the emergence of scientism and Gnosticism in Western civilisation was a result of the weakening influence of Christian institutions and culture in society, which permitted the opportunity of the innate human desire of *libido dominandi*—the will to power, dominate, and recreate reality in one's own image—to manifest itself in political ideologies.

¹⁵ Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, 297–298.

¹⁶ Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, 297–298.

¹⁷ For more about Augustine's influence on Voegelin's thought, refer to Mark Mitchell, "Regaining the Balance: An Augustinian Response to Eric Voegelin," *Humanitas* XV, no. 1 (2002), 4–31.

Nature and Historicism

Like Voegelin, Strauss was disturbed by modernity with its “value-free” science and political ideologies. The dichotomy between facts and values made it impossible for the social scientist to understand the social and political world, which was constituted on values rather than facts. Furthermore, when social scientists engaged in this type of endeavour, they were practising a form of moral relativism. As Strauss put it, “But the scientific social scientist draws a sharp line between values and facts: he regards himself as unable to pass any value judgment”.¹⁸

Whereas Voegelin believed that the ultimate cause of modernity was an innate human impulse that manifested itself in society, Strauss looked to Machiavelli as the father of modernity in Western thought. According to Strauss, Machiavelli broke from the Christian tradition in his preference for pagan Rome and its virtues.¹⁹ By substituting fortune (chance) for Christian teleology, Machiavelli redefined virtue not as an Aristotelian action relative to a fixed goal but as the pursuit of immortal glory by any means necessary.²⁰ Machiavelli decoupled politics from a normative order, thereby creating a space where humans could practise freedom without constraint.

This unmooring of the political from morality transformed humans’ understanding of nature into a technical matter to be solved, e.g., how to achieve political stability, rather than a source of normative order, e.g., what does nature tell us about how to live our lives. As Strauss wrote, “[T]he moral laws, as laws of freedom, are no longer understood as natural laws. Moral and political ideals are established without reference to man’s nature: man is radically liberated from the tutelage of nature”.²¹ For Strauss, Rousseau played a crucial role in liberation when Rousseau denied the existence of constant human nature and replaced it with the political.²² According to Rousseau, it was when particular individual wills conformed to the state’s general will that human beings would truly be free. With the erasure of nature and human nature as sources of normative order, the modern person for Strauss was free to pursue any desire he or she wished, even if it were to recreate reality in one’s utopian fantasies.

To fill this normative vacuum was historical consciousness, which Hegel introduced into Western thought. In *Natural Right and History*, Strauss contrasted the historicists with the philosopher: the former rejected “theoretical metaphysics and of philosophical ethics and natural rights”; the latter accepted them as problems to be understood because they represented a natural structure of reality.²³ The most important problem for the philosopher to solve was the quest for knowledge of the whole of reality and whether natural right—the experience of an objective right and wrong—existed. “In grasping these problems as problems”, Strauss wrote, “the human mind liberates itself from its historical imitation. No more is needed to legitimize philosophy in its original, Socratic, sense: philosophy is knowledge that one does not know; that is to say, it is knowledge of what one does not know, or awareness of the fundamental alternatives regarding their solution that are coeval with human thought”.²⁴

For Strauss, these three waves of modernity—the removal of nature as a normative source, the denial of human nature, and the development of historical consciousness—culminated in a value-free science that threatened Western civilisation. However, value-free science did not offer normative guidance for humans about how to live their lives. With the elimination of nature as a source of moral order, only history remained, which, for Strauss, ultimately devolved into moral relativism and a will to power:

History becomes a spectacle that for the superficial is exciting and for the serious is enervating. It teaches a truth that is deadly. It shows us that culture is possible only if men are fully dedicated to principles and thought and action which they do not and cannot question, which limit their horizon and thus enable them to have a character and style. It shows us at the same time that any principle of this kind can be questioned and even rejected.²⁵

¹⁸ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (University of Chicago Press, 1950), 5.

¹⁹ Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (University of Chicago Press, 1958), 116.

²⁰ Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 173, 279–80.

²¹ Leo Strauss, *Political Philosophy: Six Essays by Leo Strauss* (Pegasus, 1975), 92.

²² Strauss, *Political Philosophy: Six Essays*, 92.

²³ Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 27, 29.

²⁴ Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 31–32.

²⁵ Thomas L. Pangle, ed., *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss* (University of Chicago Press, 1989), 25.

The philosophical problem for political order was that its leaders were unable to provide principles to justify their regime other than an appeal to a moral relativist “history”. Something more was required.

Strauss turned to Nietzsche’s philosophy as a possible path out of this situation. “Nietzsche”, wrote Strauss, “is *the* philosopher of relativism: the first thinker who faced the problem of relativism in its full extent and pointed to the way in which relativism can be overcome”.²⁶ Nietzsche recognised that humans must adopt some normative perspective to look at reality, but the historicist believed that all such commitments were groundless. In Strauss’s interpretation, Nietzsche eventually accepted the superiority of nature over history by crafting a life-affirming myth that overcame the nihilism of Christianity and the moral relativism of modernity.²⁷

Faith or Reason

Claiming to be part of the Platonic tradition,²⁸ Strauss stated that the purpose of the philosopher was the “quest for wisdom, the quest for universal knowledge, for knowledge of the whole”²⁹—to focus on “the unity that is revealed in the manifest articulation of the completed whole”.³⁰ However, Plato’s Socrates claimed his desire to know the good, not the whole of reality. But given Strauss’s esoteric methodology—where philosophic readers can decipher hidden messages in the written text reserved for them—the search for universal knowledge was the true task of the philosopher.³¹

For Strauss, the search for universal knowledge came through natural reason with “the unassisted human mind”—“the human mind which is not illuminated by divine revelation”.³² Strauss called for the philosopher to employ an autonomous human reason that was independent of the divine by first starting with sense

²⁶ Strauss, *Political Philosophy: Six Essays*, 98.

²⁷ Pangle, *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, 36. See also Laurence Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche* (University of Chicago Press, 1996).

²⁸ Leo Strauss, *Studies in the Platonic Political Philosophy* (University of Chicago Press, 1983).

²⁹ Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* (University of Chicago Press, 1988), 11.

³⁰ Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 117.

³¹ Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (University of Chicago Press, 1952), 9–10. See also Arthur M. Melzer, *Philosophy Between the Lines. The Lost History of Esoteric Writing* (University of Chicago Press, 2014); James M. Rhodes, *Eros, Wisdom, and Silence: Plato’s Erotic Dialogues* (University of Missouri Press, 2003).

³² Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?*, 13.

perception and then proceeding to logical reasoning and finally “noesis”, an awareness that “is never divorced from sense perception and reasoning based on sense perception”.³³ It is through this search for universal knowledge that the philosopher would uncover the foundation for natural right and thereby restore a normative standard of morality for society.

Natural right, consequently, was that which was consistent with the whole of reality, whereas that which was bad was inconsistent and contradictory. A comprehensive theory of natural right would consist of explaining how actions were in harmony with all beings. But since the philosopher did not possess universal knowledge, they must have a form of faith to pursue this task: the whole of reality was rationally structured and intelligible.³⁴ Such a belief was akin to faith, but, for Strauss, it was not equivalent.

Strauss perceived religion as a type of dogma that regulated behaviour and opinion and did not permit prudential exceptions to its pronouncements. The result was a contradictory code for its believers. Strauss wrote, “The very variety, and more specifically, the contradiction between the various divine codes makes the idea of a divine law in the simple and primary sense of the term radically problematic”.³⁵ Furthermore, religious prophets never appealed to objective reality for their teaching; rather, they cited their experiences, which were later reported.³⁶ But these reports cannot be considered “authoritative” by the philosopher because they were subject to human interpretation. The philosopher’s search for universal knowledge cannot include the “absolute sacredness of a particular or contingent event”.³⁷ Thus, “unassisted human reason is invincibly ignorant of divine revelation”, which led Strauss to remark that being religious and being a philosopher are “mutually exclusive”.³⁸

While Strauss rejected revelation and faith as potential sources of knowledge for the philosopher’s quest, he acknowledged that revelation played a crucial role in Western civilisation by being in “tension” with philosophy.³⁹ Although the

³³ Leo Strauss, “The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy,” *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (1979), 122.

³⁴ Strauss, “The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy,” 118.

³⁵ Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 9–10.

³⁶ Strauss, “The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy,” 114.

³⁷ Strauss, “The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy,” 111.

³⁸ Strauss, “The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy,” 116.

³⁹ Strauss, “The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy,” 117.

philosopher cannot disprove religion or explain it away, it was not clear what Strauss meant by the “fruitful tension” that existed between philosophy and revelation. Did Strauss speak well of religion to preserve its utility as a means for ordering the masses⁴⁰; or was this one of the priorities for the philosopher in his or her pursuit of universal knowledge? The philosopher, for Strauss, cannot be a believer, but the philosopher may continue to seek to understand faith and revelation. It may be the case that through reason, human certainties were illuminated from within and then exposed to a reality that had transcended natural reason, i.e., divine reality.⁴¹

Strauss’s account of the crisis of modernity was due to its rejection of nature as a normative source, its denial of a constant human nature, and its acceptance of historical consciousness. This understanding of the crisis of modernity stems from his understanding of faith and reason as separate and autonomous epistemological modes. Sources of normative order, like natural right, resided in nature and reason. Experience and faith had their roles in Strauss’s thought as foils to nature and reason but ultimately were secondary to the philosopher’s task to seek a rational universal knowledge. As Strauss stated, one could be a philosopher or a believer—but not both.

Faith and Reason

Voegelin rejected the possibility of Strauss’s philosopher achieving universal knowledge through reason. In fact, Voegelin would challenge Strauss’s claims that any universal knowledge could be achieved only through reason. He would also ask Strauss if he was not engaged in a form of faith in the belief that the whole of reality was rationally structured and intelligible. For Voegelin, Strauss’s philosophical project was flawed in its ambition to know the whole of reality and rely upon reason alone.

Voegelin’s philosopher started from his or her experiential encounter with the world and, through introspection and research, sought to understand the structure of one’s consciousness and its relationship with reality.⁴² It is through the

⁴⁰ Shadia Drury, “The Esoteric Philosophy of Leo Strauss,” *Political Theory* 13, no. 3 (1985), 315–37.

⁴¹ Kenneth Hart Green, *Jew and Philosopher: The Return of Maimonides in the Jewish Thought of Leo Strauss* (State University of New York Press, 1993).

⁴² Eric Voegelin, “On the Theory of Consciousness,” in Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics* (University of Missouri Press, 2002), 62–83; Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, Vol. V, *In Search of Order* (University of Missouri Press, 2000), 28–30.

philosopher’s participation in reality—God, nature, human beings, and society—that reality was illuminated, albeit incompletely. The philosopher’s task was to identify his or her constitutive experiences with reality, especially transcendent reality, and articulate them in language and symbols to convey these experiences and invite others to share in them.

For Voegelin, the articulation of the philosopher’s experience with reality was not idiosyncratic but evaluated against a datum of experience of others’ experiences throughout history.⁴³ What was discovered was that the philosopher’s experience with transcendent reality corresponded to previous encounters of people, although articulated differently due to each period’s unique historical and societal context.⁴⁴ For example, Socrates’s encounter with his *daimon* gave birth to philosophy with its distinction between *nomos* and *physis*.⁴⁵ Likewise, Moses’s relationship with Yahweh gave rise to the notion of a people living in history.⁴⁶ These two encounters with transcendent reality were similar in that the individuals’ experiences crafted a new language and symbols around which people organised their lives.

The philosopher therefore could evaluate his or her own experiences with reality against this datum of experience. Accomplishing this required extensive research into people’s past encounters with transcendent reality to reconstruct their experiential consciousness as much as possible. But, for Voegelin, it was important to note that it was this process of the philosopher’s understanding of his or her own consciousness against the datum of experience that provided verification of the philosopher’s experience. Verification did not consist of the truth of a statement (the symbol) or the truth of the experience (which was impossible to recreate fully); rather, it was through the process of verification itself that the truth became “luminous in the procedural tension between experience and symbolization”.⁴⁷

⁴³ Eric Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint: The Political Religions; The New Science of Politics; and Science, Politics, and Gnosticism* (University of Missouri Press, 2000), 138.

⁴⁴ Eric Voegelin, “Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History,” in Eric Voegelin, *Published Essays, 1966–1985* (University of Missouri Press, 1990), 115–133.

⁴⁵ Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, Vol. III: *Plato and Aristotle* (University of Missouri Press, 1999), 60–61.

⁴⁶ Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, Vol. I: *Israel and Revelation* (University of Missouri Press, 2001), 431–480.

⁴⁷ Eric Voegelin, “Remembrance of Things Past,” in Eric Voegelin, *Published Essays, 1966–1985* (University of Missouri Press, 1990), 312–13.

In other words, because it was impossible for the philosopher to separate his or her experience of transcendent reality from the articulation of it, verification could not equate to the truth of a statement (the symbol). Since the philosopher could never be an outside detached observer of reality for Voegelin, he or she would always have an incomplete understanding of transcendent reality and therefore would always have an incomplete account of it.⁴⁸ As a participant within reality, the philosopher could only verify whether a person's experiential consciousness had an experience with transcendent reality by examining his or her own consciousness—a process which paradoxically revealed to him or her that the philosopher is not aware of his or her own consciousness but aware of something outside of him or her, i.e., transcendent reality.⁴⁹

According to Voegelin, the recognition of transcendent reality forced the philosopher to acknowledge his or her own ignorance.⁵⁰ By remedying his or her own ignorance, the philosopher became aware of his or her own consciousness and transcendent reality. Voegelin called this process “luminosity”. The process of verification required the philosopher to examine his or her own consciousness to discover “the truth of consciousness” by participating in the historical process of reality; or, as Voegelin wrote, “the order of history emerges from the history of order”.⁵¹

The philosopher's experience of transcendent reality in his or her consciousness radiated an interpretation of social order that was different from the existing one.⁵² An example would be Socrates's criticism of the sophists: the experience of transcendent reality in Socrates's consciousness articulated itself as philosophy—the search for truth—that supplanted the morality of conventional sophistic discourse. The Socratic insight of philosophy differentiated itself from the previous compact moral order of sophism.⁵³ Voegelin's theory of consciousness, therefore, was not a subjective solipsism but rather a ranking of experiential encounters with transcendence. It is this process of sorting between greater and lesser insights of transcendent reality that Voegelin called “history”.

48 Eric Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture,” in *Published Essays, 1966-1985*, 177.

49 Eric Voegelin, “The Consciousness of the Ground,” in Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis* (University of Missouri Press, 1978), 148–49.

50 Voegelin, “The Consciousness of the Ground,” 148–49.

51 Voegelin, *Order and History*, Vol. I: *Israel and Revelation*, 19.

52 Voegelin, “The Consciousness of the Ground,” 147–48.

53 Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture,” 194–95.

The ranking of these insights was done by those who had a philosophic experience with transcendence and formed by it. Voegelin cited Aristotle's comment that only the *spoudaios* was capable of theoretical discussion of the good.⁵⁴ It was the morally mature and serious person who could evaluate the morality of a situation, distinguishing greater and lesser insights about transcendent reality. In this sense, Voegelin, like Aristotle, was a moral elitist and did not think that superior moral insight did not rest upon intersubjective transmissible evidence. However, the character of the morally serious person was not fixed for Voegelin either; rather, it was whether each person would be receptive and respond to his or her experience of transcendence.

Given this account of consciousness, both faith and reason at their core stemmed from a person's experiential encounter with transcendence.⁵⁵ They are equivalent to one another. Revelation and faith, therefore, were not information transmitted to humans from a supernatural entity but a person's articulation of his or her encounter with transcendent reality. The Decalogue was not a transcription of God's teaching but a symbolic articulation of “the substance of divine order to be absorbed by the souls of those who listen to the call”.⁵⁶ Likewise, Aristotle's experience of human and divine reality was expressed symbolically in *nous*. Faith consequently for Voegelin was not a comprehensive code of behaviour and opinion, as Strauss claimed, but, like philosophy, a symbolic expression of a person's encounter with transcendent reality.

This account of faith and reason informed Voegelin's diagnosis of modernity as Gnostic. The suppression of transcendent reality from the datum of experience replaced the philosopher's pursuit of incomplete knowledge with certainty about knowledge itself. For Voegelin, both faith and reason were different articulations of the same experience of transcendent reality. It was the refusals of Gnosticism and scientism to acknowledge the transcendent reality that created a distorted reality of political ideologies that haunted twentieth-century Western civilization.

54 Eric Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint*, 64–65.

55 Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, Vol. IV: *The Ecumenic Age* (University of Missouri Press, 2000), 217, 228, 249–50.

56 Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, Vol. I: *Israel and Revelation* (University of Missouri Press, 2001), 425–26.

Conclusion

Given their divergent understandings of faith and reason, Voegelin and Strauss perceived the crisis of modernity differently. Voegelin believed that faith and revelation were a person's expression of his or her encounter with transcendent reality; Strauss considered them creed, dogma, and law. Voegelin understood reason akin to faith at its experiential motivating core but only expressed differently due to differing societal and historical contexts. Strauss thought that reason was separate and autonomous from faith and could achieve universal knowledge apart from it.

Strauss also would have objections to Habermas's post-metaphysical thought, although they would be different from Voegelin's. Habermas's rejection of metaphysics—or, to use Strauss's term, "nature"—would place the post-metaphysical project as a type of historicism where moral relativism would reign in the name of cooperative truth. Furthermore, the eventual shredding of faith for communicative reason eliminates the fruitful tension of reason and revelation about which Strauss wrote. Although Habermas permitted a place for religion in his post-metaphysical project, its place was clearly secondary to communicative reason rather than being co-equals as Strauss would have advocated.

The discussion about the relationship between faith and reason in academic and public discourse is a welcome one, for clearly, something feels amiss in the modern world today, whether it is the decline in social capital,⁵⁷ the rise of social pathologies,⁵⁸ or the advent of extreme political polarisation⁵⁹ in society. Faith and reason together are seen by some as a possible way to revive society.⁶⁰ But before we can ask whether this is something we should pursue, we first need to ask: What do we mean by faith and reason? Voegelin and Strauss provided answers to these questions, and whether we agree or not, their writings on these issues offer greater clarity and perspective on this relationship, its place in modernity, and a possible way out.

⁵⁷ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon & Schuster, 2000).

⁵⁸ Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010* (Crown Forum, 2012).

⁵⁹ James E. Campbell, *Polarized: Making Sense of Polarized America* (Princeton University Press, 2018).

⁶⁰ R. R. Reno, *Resurrecting the Idea of a Christian Society* (Salem Books, 2016).

4 Eric Voegelin versus Leo Strauss on Post-Constitutionalism

JAMES R. STONER, JR.

To my knowledge, Eric Voegelin and Leo Strauss engaged in only one published dispute. In 1949, Voegelin reviewed Strauss's book, *On Tyranny*, published the previous year, and Strauss responded as part of an essay, "Restatement on Xenophon's *Hiero*", originally published in the 1954 French edition of *On Tyranny* and published for the first time in English in his 1959 book, *What Is Political Philosophy?*¹ Strauss's "Restatement" also included a lengthy response to Alexander Kojève's review of *On Tyranny*, and scholarly commentary on the "Restatement"—which is usually treated as a major Straussian text—focuses almost entirely on the response to Kojève, but in fact, Strauss's replies to the two authors—he calls them "the only criticisms of my study from which one can learn anything"²—are proportionate in length to the two reviews. Although the personal warmth of Strauss's friendship with Kojève gives their correspondence a very different colour than the more formal correspondence of Voegelin and Strauss, the published reply does not obviously favour Kojève, except

¹ Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny*, revised & expanded, eds. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (University of Chicago Press, 2000). Strauss's "Restatement" appears in this edition. Voegelin's review appeared in *The Review of Politics* 11, no. 2 (April 1949), 241–244.

² Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 178.

in calling him one of “the very few who know how to think and who love to think [...] a philosopher and not an intellectual”,³ something he does not say about Voegelin. In fact, though Strauss does not say so, he might seem to treat Voegelin’s critique, based on the purported need for post-constitutional dictatorship, to come from his right, while Kojève’s praise of the project of world government—the “universal and homogeneous state”—clearly comes from the left. In this paper, I will concentrate on the exchange between Strauss and Voegelin, though I will bring in a thought or two about Kojève when I think it can cast light.

Voegelin’s Review

Voegelin’s review of *On Tyranny*—Strauss’s close commentary on Xenophon’s dialogue *Hiero*—shares with Strauss a recognition that “we are living in an age of tyranny”, and he praises Strauss’s attention to the problem of “intellectual criticism under a tyrannical government”. Moreover, his recognition that Xenophon’s Simonides “collaborates with tyranny” in advising the tyrant Hiero how to improve his rule—using a term fraught with disapprobation in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War—suggests the discussion that is coming and suggests Strauss may be open to his analysis of post-constitutionalism, which in a way he is. But after a paragraph of description and this mild praise, Voegelin turns to his critique.

Strauss presents Xenophon’s discussion of tyranny as instructive in the age of Hitler and Stalin. He wrote in the original volume, “[W]hen we were brought face to face with tyranny—with a kind of tyranny that surpassed the boldest imagination of the most powerful thinkers of the past—our political science failed to recognize it”.⁴ In the “Restatement”, he ups the rhetorical ante: “A social science that cannot speak of tyranny with the same confidence with which medicine speaks of cancer, cannot understand social phenomena as what they are”. Then, he proceeds: “Once we have learned again from the classics what tyranny is, we shall be able and compelled to diagnose as tyrannies a number of contemporary regimes which appear in the guise of dictatorships”.⁵ According to Voegelin, however, this is not sufficient. He wrote in his review,

[F]or Xenophon, as well as for Plato, the problem of tyranny had already become one of historical necessity, not merely of theoretical discussion. The Socratic circle might well define tyranny as a defective form of government; that, however, did not change the fact that the polis democracy had degenerated to the point where “tyranny” [Voegelin now puts the term in “scare quotes”] became the inevitable alternative to a democracy which had ceased to function effectively.⁶

A new vocabulary was needed for a situation that was quite new, and Voegelin notes that by the end of the dialogue, Xenophon supplies it, switching from “tyrant” to “ruler”. Strauss had explored this shift in terms of Simonides’s rhetorical strategy to persuade Hiero to reform his way of ruling, but Voegelin will have none of it: Plato and Xenophon dimly recognised that the world had changed, and they needed to alter their way of thinking and speaking to keep up. Classical Greece had entered a “post-constitutional situation”, and political science needed to change as well.

Though Voegelin finds a vague sense of this in Xenophon and in Plato’s *Statesman*, the key thinker who built explicitly on Xenophon—though on his *Education of Cyrus*, not his *Hiero*—was Machiavelli. Voegelin argues that “Machiavelli [...] actually achieved the theoretical creation of a concept of rulership in the post-constitutional situation”. Thanks to the mirror of princes genre and its paradigm, *The Life of Tamerlaine*, “there has entered into the classical post-constitutional conqueror and ruler the non-classical conception of the new ruler as the avenger of the misdeeds of a corrupt people, that is, the idea of the ruler as the *ultor peccatorum*”. In Machiavelli, this figure appears as the “armed prophet” of Chapter 6 of *The Prince*. Voegelin continues, “The spiritual, apocalyptic aspect of the new ruler [...] is neither ‘ancient’ nor ‘modern’; it is Western-Christian as opposed to Hellenic-Pagan”.⁷ The new tyranny of the totalitarians, no doubt beginning with Napoleon and then expanding in the twentieth century with Hitler, Stalin, and Mao, has to be understood through the lens of gnostic ideologies or political religions, something genuinely new in the world, the novelty of which can be ignored only by denying human historicity.

³ Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 185–86.

⁴ Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 23.

⁵ Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 77.

⁶ Voegelin, *The Review of Politics* 15, 241–42.

⁷ Voegelin, *The Review of Politics* 15, 243.

As if to end on a positive note, Voegelin closes his review with praise for Strauss's analysis of "the subtle gradation of human ranks in the *Hiero*", including the "gentleman", the "just man", the "brave man", the "real man", and the "sage". Strauss's analysis is not precisely conveyed by this list: The reference to the just, the brave, and the wise is to a passage in the *Hiero*, where the tyrant expresses his fear of the brave, the wise, and the just, while the terms "gentlemen" and "real men" are introduced by Simonides in his response or instruction to Hiero, where the political ruler or lover of honour is described as a "real man", and the gentlemen (*kaloikagathoi*, perhaps brave and just together) can be tamed by extending the protection of mercenary bodyguards to them, too, not just to the tyrant, allowing them the "leisure to concern themselves with their private property". But Voegelin's point is not to explore these gradations but to point towards those left out: "the tyrant's contempt for the herd" is the precursor to the new "mass-man incapable of self-government [...] making this new type of ruler historically necessary".⁸ The gesture towards reconciliation, then, in Voegelin's penultimate paragraph, only prepares his repetition of his thesis: The tyranny Xenophon speaks of died with the Greek polis; modern tyranny is not illuminated without attention to the vast changes in political life and thought, moving together, since then.

Strauss's Reply

How does Strauss respond to Voegelin in his "Restatement"? Naturally, he rejects the hint of historicism in Voegelin's review; in his original introduction to *On Tyranny*, Strauss makes clear his rejection of historical thinking, in fact, suggesting it is actually what underlies modern totalitarianism: "The manifest and deliberate collectivization or coordination of thought is being prepared in a hidden and frequently quite unconscious way by the spread of teaching that all human thought is collective independently of any human effort directed to this end, because all human thought is historical".⁹ Already in *On Tyranny*, one finds Strauss writing with his mature conception of scholarship: that the first task of the scholar, and what he aims to achieve in his commentary on Xenophon, is to understand the thinker of the past

as he understood himself. This is emphatically not a rejection of the importance of historical circumstance, only of the opinion that thought is caught in its web. On the contrary, Strauss agrees with Voegelin that there are post-constitutional circumstances when, because of popular corruption, dictatorial rule is the only possible political order. Or rather, to be clear, such circumstances to Strauss are and are not post-constitutional. Since I think Strauss is strictly following Aristotle in his analysis, let me review Aristotle's account of regimes or constitutions.

The Greek word is *politeia*, and Strauss himself suggested translating it as "regime" to indicate not only the form of government or governing power but the whole way of life that it entails: "regime" as in "the Old Regime", he said. The word could also be translated as "polity" or "constitution" or even, going through Latin, "republic" (Plato's dialogue which we call the *Republic* was in Greek *Politeia*, the constitution or regime). Now, Aristotle in his *Politics* says there are six regimes or polities: kingship, aristocracy, polity, democracy, oligarchy, tyranny—saying the last is barely a regime at all.¹⁰ The first three of these rule for the common good, the latter three only for the advantage of the ruler or ruling body; they are, of course, also distinguished by number, with aristocracy and oligarchy both being ruled by the few, kingship and tyranny by one, polity and democracy by many. It is important to note for our purpose that "politeia" or "polity" (or constitution) is used to name the genus and one of the species. There are six forms of constitution, and one of them is *constitutional* government. Thus, as there is ambiguity in Aristotle's term "constitution"—and I think Strauss means to follow him exactly—so there is ambiguity in the term "post-constitutional": Does it refer to the collapse of constitutional government in the specific sense, the mixed constitution best arranged so that the middle class predominates, not the rich or poor? Or does it mean the collapse of government of any sort of constitution, leaving tyranny—the regime that is hardly a constitution—as the only resort? Voegelin seems to mean the latter when he uses the term "post-constitutional", but Strauss means the former; for Voegelin, post-constitutional dictatorship is a new historical form of tyranny that emerges only after the collapse of the polis, whether a democracy or polity, but for Strauss, dictatorship is one of the varieties of kingship that Aristotle lists in Book III of the *Politics*. Actually, as one discovers in books four, five, and six, all the basic

⁸ Voegelin, *The Review of Politics* 15, 244.

⁹ Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 27.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1279a25 ff.

regimes have various sub-forms, with the possible exception of tyranny—although even that may have two forms, as adumbrated in Book V when Aristotle describes the two methods of preserving a tyranny: Periander’s, so to speak, which entails “lopping off the outstanding ears”, dividing the people to prevent the formation of civic trust and friendship, and so forth, on the one hand, and something like the method Xenophon’s Simonides proposes, acting like the king. While Aristotle’s lists shade into one another—part of what defines a polity, the mixed regime, is that some call it a democracy and some an oligarchy (like America!),¹¹ and aristocracy and oligarchy can grow together at the border, as can polity and democracy, and perhaps dictatorship and tyranny—Strauss nevertheless insists on the distinction between dictatorship and tyranny. Caesarism—the name he invokes for post-constitutional dictatorship—is not unjust if, given the state of general corruption, it is the best a city can manage at a certain time, while tyranny must keep its bad name, Strauss insists. Contra Voegelin, it can be accounted for by Aristotelian categories, without the need for a historical exception. And if this is true for Caesar, it is for modern dictators as well: Voegelin’s reference to Machiavelli’s “armed prophet” as the solution to post-constitutionalism in a Christian or post-Christian world might seem to suggest that the critical historical moment was not the collapse of the polis but the rise of Christianity—the empire not simply succeeding the republic in Rome for internal reasons but because of the universalism implicit or explicit in Christian faith—but Strauss corrects him on that, too: Machiavelli introduces the armed prophet in contrast to the unarmed prophet (he mentions Savonarola but implicitly includes Jesus), not in contrast to the armed tyrant. As Strauss writes elsewhere, there was nothing known by Machiavelli that was not known to the ancients when it came to political necessity; or as he writes in his “Restatement”, Machiavelli “speaks of Moses [an armed prophet in *Prince*, Chapter 6] in exactly the same manner in which every classical political philosopher would have spoken of him; Moses was one of the greatest legislators or founders who ever lived”.¹²

Some years later, in the only other explicit reference to Strauss I know of that Voegelin published, in the essay on “Industrial Society in Search of Reason”, Voegelin writes, respectfully, that Strauss endorses “the classical concept that modern societies are not good because they are too large and do not allow the citizens to participate

fully in public office”.¹³ If he means by this—and I am not sure he does—that Strauss would endorse reviving the ancient polis, I do not think he would be correct, for Strauss holds not that classical politics can and should be resurrected but rather that classical *political science* should be. Regarding post-constitutionalism, that means attending not only to Aristotle’s inclusion of dictatorship as a form of kingship, but also to his general reticence about the unfortunate side of politics and concentration on legality and the encouragement of constitutional government. In this, he concedes Voegelin’s point that Xenophon is silent on post-constitutional dictatorship but insists this is not for failing to notice the phenomenon—as we have seen, Aristotle gave it brief mention—but out of prudential consideration: “To stress the fact that [...] Caesars can take care of themselves”.¹⁴

Classical political science, then, was not an objective analysis of political life for Strauss, if there could be such a thing. It did not detach itself, even when speaking about ordinary politics, from its fundamental quest for the best regime—that is, its fundamental intellectual quest for the best regime and its recognition that this will never, or hardly ever, see itself instantiated in an actual city. It looked at practical politics warily, endorsing constitutional democracy as the best practicable regime in most cases, but aware that circumstances sometimes made even this impossible. Still, political science is the science of the polity, and so it holds a special place for the polity, that is, for constitutional democracy, and thus endorses the ordinary virtue of civic spiritedness. The political scientist might speak privately to a prince if he chooses to collaborate with a tyrant to turn him towards justice or with a dictatorship in troubled times, but in public, he must generally speak the language of republicanism. In a situation where there is overall freedom of speech, his esotericism need not be a fully developed secret teaching, but he must still engage in euphemism.

Imagining Voegelin’s Response

To my knowledge, Voegelin never replied to Strauss’s response to his review of *On Tyranny*, so let me try to imagine what he would have said. First, of course,

¹³ See Charles R. Embry and Glenn Hughes, eds., *The Eric Voegelin Reader: Politics, History, Consciousness* (University of Missouri Press, 2017), 79.

¹⁴ Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 180.

¹¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1294b15.

¹² Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 183.

Voegelin had an extensively developed philosophy of history and could not possibly concede Strauss's point about the simplicity and grandeur of the classics being adequate to explain the whole range of political phenomena known to us in the world today. Strauss himself concedes as much when he acknowledges that "the difference between present-day tyranny and classical tyranny has its roots in the difference between modern notions of philosophy and science and the classical notions of philosophy and science". It is all very well to say that the ancients foresaw the dangers of a technologically oriented science as well as the related dangers of popular enlightenment and so "did not dream of present-day tyranny because they regarded its basic presuppositions as so preposterous that they turned their imaginations in entirely different directions".¹⁵ But the technological cat is out of the bag, so to speak, and will not be put back in, even if, thanks to technology itself, the age of popular enlightenment might be coming to an end. If the ancients have nothing more to say than that the world took a fatefully wrong turn five hundred years ago, would that not simply prove what modern people suspect—that they have very little to say to us today? Of course, Voegelin does not think *that* is so, despite his historicism. He, too, was a great admirer of the ancients, like Strauss, especially of Plato; though they read Plato very differently, Voegelin no more than Strauss would dismiss Plato because he did not know our technology, much less the modern natural science on which it is based. As best I can tell, Voegelin developed his notion of *equivalences* to explore how he could at once document irreversible changes in the progress of human civilisation while simultaneously identifying patterns that frame successor civilisations.¹⁶ The age of myth, after all, has been irreversibly abandoned with the pneumatic breakthrough of Israel and the noetic breakthrough of the Greek philosophers; any attempt at return yields not the beauty and insight of Homer, but the deformation of modern ideology. Likewise, then, on the political level, could ancient tyranny not be to the world of the polis the equivalent of modern totalitarian dictatorship in relation to the state, which is perhaps all Voegelin means to say in critiquing Strauss's attempt to draw a lesson from a Xenophontic dialogue for the totalitarian age?

Second, as Voegelin's reference to Machiavelli's invocation of prophets, armed or unarmed, in political life suggests, does the advent of Christianity not change the world in a decisive way, again irreversibly, with its teaching of men made in the image of God, a universal teaching that forever left behind any hope that the human soul could be satisfied with the spiritual world of the polis? In his *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, first given as lectures in 1953, and so around the same time as the "Restatement", Strauss himself makes a related point when he says that Machiavelli learned from Christianity the possibility of propaganda, that is, of effectively changing the world by changing men's minds universally.¹⁷ In the "Restatement", Strauss related Machiavelli not to Christianity, which he thinks he deplored, but to Averroes (Ibn Rushd),¹⁸ but does the latter not also represent the adaptation of philosophy to the world of monotheistic religion, a decisive shift even if one based not on the discovery of new truth but on world-encompassing changes in human thought? Moreover, one of Strauss's leading followers, the political philosopher Pierre Manent, seems to side with Voegelin against Strauss on the question of historical transformation. In his *Metamorphoses of the City*, Manent distinguishes the question of political *regime*, which he accepts as sufficiently sketched by Aristotle, from the question of political *form*—polis, empire, nation—which the ancients ignored, even though they knew the terms and several early versions of the phenomena.¹⁹ For Manent, that means attending to what he calls in an earlier work "the Science of Rome",²⁰ referring both to the post-constitutional empire and to the subsequent development of the Roman Church as an independent and coordinated power devoted to care for the souls of men. Manent writes as a political philosopher but also as a Catholic—perhaps as a Catholic Straussian or at least a Catholic reader of Strauss,²¹ as the phrase has developed—and while no one would seriously mistake Strauss as a Catholic sympathiser, he does seem to recognise that Christianity has had a decisive effect on philosophy and consequently on politics. Even if he means to reverse the former, does he really intend to reverse the latter—at least in the absence of a world-destroying catastrophe that,

¹⁷ Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Free Press, 1959), 173.

¹⁸ Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 184.

¹⁹ Pierre Manent, *Metamorphoses of the City* (Harvard University Press, 2013), 18–19.

²⁰ Manent, *The City of Man* (Princeton University Press, 1998), 206.

²¹ See Geoffrey Vaughan, ed., *Leo Strauss and his Catholic Readers* (The Catholic University of America Press, 2018).

¹⁵ Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 178.

¹⁶ See his "Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History," in *The Eric Voegelin Reader*, 198–217.

like the floods or other natural disasters referred to in Plato's *Laws* and throughout the classical tradition, requires civilisation to start over?

Finally, could Voegelin not point out that Strauss himself, recognising the radical changes wrought by modern science and technology, on the one hand, and Christian, or more generally religious, universalism, on the other, must know that his return to classical political philosophy is only the beginning of an effort to reconstruct political science, drawing on classical principles rather than on principles announced by those who rejected the classics—the whole tradition from Machiavelli through Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Hegel, not to mention Marx—a project he means to launch but by no means to complete, a project that would require what Tocqueville called “a new political science [...] for a world altogether new”, or what Voegelin himself offered as a “New Science of Politics”.²² Surely the “change of orientation” Strauss invoked, “accustom[ing] our eyes to the noble reserve and the quiet grandeur of the classics”,²³ cannot rest with the reading of the great books of the past without beginning the difficult scientific work of rebuilding political science, which—precisely on classical terms—needs to be a practical science, able to speak to the needs of cities and statesmen in the here and now.

Imagining Strauss's Rejoinder

If that is how Voegelin might reply to Strauss's response to Voegelin's review of Strauss's commentary on Xenophon's *Hiero*, let me conclude by adding as a final layer how Strauss in turn might rebut these objections. To the first point, covering science and technology, Strauss famously writes in the Introduction to *Natural Right and History*—another book he reworked for publication in 1953 around the time the “Restatement” first appeared—that the question of the ancients and moderns on natural right—that is, the key issue in political philosophy—cannot be resolved without understanding whether modern natural science has decisively refuted Aristotle's account of nature.²⁴ By stressing technology rather than natural science

²² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 7; Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (University of Chicago Press, 1952).

²³ Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 185.

²⁴ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (University of Chicago Press, 1953), 8.

itself, Strauss found a way to bracket the question, so to speak, but there does appear to be some urgency to clarifying where Aristotle has been proven to be wrong—in his account of rectilinear motion, for example, or the theory of the spheres—and where his ideas remain plausible, for example, in metaphysics or in the basic categories and causes, not to mention in fields like rhetoric or poetics or ethics, where his work remains foundational. To my knowledge, this is a question Voegelin does not raise, or at least does not seem much troubled by, though I suppose he can avoid the issue because he does not ground his thought on nature, as Strauss insists classical philosophy does. Still, what are equivalences if not natural patterns, maybe at a second remove? The Big Bang Theory, after all, does not refute the eternity of the universe, only of the stars and other astronomical phenomena we know; do the theoretical physicists not theorise there might eventually be a big implosion and then perhaps another big bang, a grand natural cycle?

Second, concerning Christianity, Strauss actually has a lot to say about it, but less in the context of natural theology than in his account of Jerusalem and Athens and the radical difference between the principles of reason and revelation—and his repeated assertion that neither principle can refute the other so that we live as thinkers under the authority of one or the other, as philosophers who cannot refute revealed theology or theologians who cannot deny philosophy. This teaches a lesson of moderation, I suppose, not wholly at odds with the moderation he says the classical political philosophers recommend as a virtue.²⁵ I am aware that there is a school of Straussians—maybe even the dominant school, headed by the German scholar Heinrich Meier—who think Strauss was simply an atheist and only presents his argument about the inability of either philosophy or revelation to refute the other as a smokescreen to allow him to gain allies among us poor believers, but I found more true both to Strauss's texts and to Strauss's un-Spinozistic attachment to Judaism Daniel Tanguay's suggestion that Strauss is sincere in the zetetic character of philosophy, which entails, I think, leaving open this ultimate question.²⁶ I am not

²⁵ See Leo Strauss, “Jerusalem and Athens: Some Preliminary Reflections” and “The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy,” reprinted in Peter Emberly and Barry Cooper, eds., *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence Between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934-1964* (University of Missouri Press, 2004).

²⁶ Cf. Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Daniel Tanguay, *Leo Strauss: An Intellectual Biography* (Yale University Press, 2007).

sure that Voegelin's own position on these matters is more open to religious faith, at least to any doctrinal faith like Catholic Christianity (not to mention law-based faith like Judaism and Islam), except in its mystical or process-theological forms.

Finally, regarding Strauss's use of the classics as the key foundation for a reconstructed political science: I think he might say that the point of his book *On Tyranny* is to raise the question of the relative standing of the life of politics and the life of philosophy, for as his commentary unfolds, I take him to be saying that the life of tyranny is the political life in its logical extreme, the life that craves honour and does whatever it takes to earn it, benefitting those who give honour and seeking authority to administer benefits—a point Aristotle makes in Book VII of the *Politics* when he says of the man who takes power in order to exercise his practical virtue most effectively that he would never make up with the good he would do the harm he already did on the way to power.²⁷ This is why, in the end, Strauss devotes more attention to Kojève than to Voegelin in his “Restatement”, for Kojève recognises that this is Strauss's point and makes the counterargument that the philosopher, too, craves honour or recognition, which is why his thought always returns to the forum and seeks to change the world. In defending the life of philosophy against this claim, a claim that Strauss concedes entails the universal and homogeneous state that he deplores, Strauss points, on the one hand, towards nature and philosophy and so really does have to speak to that question of nature—but points, on the other hand, to a kind of political science, which perhaps today we should call “civics” or “civic thought”, that explains the value of constitutionalism and encourages citizens at once to recognise its limits and attach themselves to its nobility, leaving the Caesars to take care of themselves.

The Person as the Heart of Voegelin's Effort to Save Modernity from Itself

DAVID WALSH

Eric Voegelin became a critic of modernity in his struggle to understand the world in which he found himself. His early works build towards an analysis of the totalitarian convulsion that almost destroyed him. But it was only in *The New Science of Politics* that he found the theoretical means of penetrating the disaster that engulfed the twentieth century. In connecting it with Gnosticism, he could finally understand what made the ideological mass movements more than a political phenomenon. They were not about the distribution of costs and benefits that conventionally occupy political life but about the certainty of spiritual salvation for those who possess unique access to the means of bringing it about. In effecting self-perfection, men absorb divinity into themselves without remainder. In the classic Gnostic pattern, this meant that mere mortals could act like God without countenancing any limits on the range of what they were permitted. Gnosis was the form of knowledge that was unavailable to the ignorant masses, who now must be viewed as mere inconveniences over whom the march of history passes without a trace. What is

²⁷ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1325b5.

striking about Voegelin's complaint is not the distortion of salvation history in these Gnostic narratives, but the bottomless contempt with which the anonymous links in the human chain were to be regarded. The unique, irreplaceable value with which classical and Christian philosophy had invested each of them has been thoroughly cast aside. Individual responsibility has been lost as the collective movement of history is transacted over their heads.

Disdain for actual human beings in the name of abstractions that serve none individually is an affront that stirred Voegelin to his core. Again and again, one meets exclamations of an outrage that would be difficult to overlook as the animating centre of his thought. For all the detached tone Voegelin evinces, he cannot conceal the *cri de coeur* from which the deepest wellsprings of his reflections arise. Beneath the flinty surface is a revulsion that cannot abide the denigration of concrete persons in practice. It is from this that his work draws the implacable moral judgements that he will not evade. Without fully articulating it to himself, Voegelin seems guided by the imperative of defending the dignity and worth of every single person that makes each one the centre of the universe. He perceives the imago Dei they carry within and the seal of divine love that marks each as transcending all else in existence. It was because Voegelin was led by that deep vein of inspiration that he became an unwavering foe of all schemes that sacrificed individuals in the name of ideology. It is only regrettable that the visceral quality of that response tended to eclipse the regimes of reciprocity that could guard the value of every person within them. No political paradigm quite matched his own intuition of the inexhaustible depth of the person. The best he could do was to rage against the spiritual sleight of hand that seemed to lie behind the limitless infliction of misery he observed.

It was the need to unmask this false idealism, which sought to destroy human beings in the name of saving them, that led him to recognise antinomian Gnosticism as the source of the phenomenon. Hatred of creation that became a hatred of individual human beings could only be tolerated if was done under the guise of liberating them, as the Gnostic revolutionaries had proposed. The contradiction between killing men in order to save them might be exposed, but it would not be resolved unless there was a way for them to live with the imperfections that had also been stamped as irremediable. It would be necessary to hold each one as worthy of transcendent recognition while acknowledging the impossibility of fully actualising it on this side

of the eschaton. That non-perfectionist politics that was simultaneously the more modest and the more elevated expression of politics was both the boundary and the limit of Voegelin's thought. All that he knew sprang from its compelling truth, even if he never quite managed to capture the means of its political evocation. To do so would have meant embracing the intermediate style of politics that grounded itself on self-limitation and self-restraint. In place of the revolutionary claim to infallibility, he would have to enjoin the higher infallibility of friendship that bridges the differences between human beings. Jean Bodin's reassurance to his friend, Jean Bautru, that their theological differences would never disturb the friendship between them remained for Voegelin the model.¹ It was simply that Voegelin could never see how that model could assume political form, even though he approached it in the account of truth and representation in the first part of *The New Science*. What seemed like the spirit of "live and let live" that underpinned what later would be called "liberal democracy", remained for him too close to the nihilistic wasteland from which all that is meaningful had been evacuated. It was especially when the latter became the breeding ground for the totalitarian excesses that it was difficult, if not impossible, for the more elevated strand of liberal politics to come to the fore. This is especially the case in the bewildering context of the mid-century when the ideological standoff of the Cold War made the future seem so uncertain. The one thing that does emerge in his thinking at the time of *The New Science* is that Voegelin held onto his faith in the person as the most precious reality in the universe, as he scoured the intellectual landscape for predecessors who might have pointed the way. None of them had made their way towards the liberal paradigm of dignity and rights for the quite simple reason that the practice had not yet taken hold within

¹ "From this one may learn that they are mistaken who think agreement on divine matters is necessary in a friendship. For even though Justice, one of the finest virtues, and the good faith between men in society which arises from it, scarcely seem able to exist without religion or dread of some divine power, nevertheless, the strength and goodness of men's natures are sometimes so great that they are able to draw together into mutual affection men who are unwilling and quarrelsome." Jean Bodin, "Letter to Jean Bautru", in *Jean Bodin: Selected Writings on Philosophy, Religion and Politics*, ed. Paul Lawrence Rose, 79–81 (Droz, 1980). See Eric Voegelin, *Religion and the Rise of Modernity, History of Political Ideas*, Vol. V, in *Collected Works*, ed. James Wiser, Vol. 23 (University of Missouri Press, 1998), Chapter 6: "Bodin." The significance of Bodin's example for Voegelin is underlined when he returns to it in an extended discussion in "Tensions in the Reality of Knowledge", included in the final chapter of *Anamnesis*. It is notable, however, that even there Voegelin treats it in the context of a mysticism beyond articulation rather than in relation to the depth of the person and the mutuality of friendship as Bodin emphasised above.

history. Yet the conviction to which Voegelin remained steadfast does explain the high regard in which he held the Anglo-American regimes, even while treating them minimally in his thought. In this, he was not alone. The evolution of Catholic social teaching demonstrates a similarly belated shift from hostility to “individualism” to an embrace of personalist politics as its more positive affirmation.²

Tension within The New Science of Politics

This is the elusive tension, elusive even from the author’s point of view, that characterises *The New Science of Politics*. It is not simply that the biting critique of modernity, which ends inconclusively, does not manage to articulate the source of its own convictions.³ Nor is it the disconnection between that later critique and the earlier account of representation and truth that seems like an endorsement of self-governing polities. It is that they are never brought together into a coherent statement of what unites them. Perhaps it is time, therefore, to read Voegelin’s own great distillation of his thought at mid-century backwards rather than forwards. The Gnosticism thesis towards which it leads then ceases to be as central as it appears. It is equally possible to read Voegelin’s best-known work as a counter-Gnostic effort to save modernity from itself. Some support for such a reading may be gained from a lecture given in 1961 and published the following year as “World-Empire and the Unity of Mankind”.⁴ This essay marks Voegelin’s turn from the immediate totalitarian crisis that had absorbed him to the wider civilisational challenge that came to define the last phase of his work. Notably, the Gnostic connection plays almost no role there. But what does concern Voegelin is the instrumentalisation of the person in any progressivist view of history that sacrifices individuals for a collective goal they have made possible. Persons are lost in what Turgot termed “*la masse totale*”.⁵ They have lost responsibility by being absorbed into an anonymous aggregate that wholly

² Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015). Even the connection with the epistemic modesty of Socratic philosophy is an overlooked resource.

³ Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics. An Introduction* (University of Chicago Press, 1952), Chapter 6: “The End of Modernity.”

⁴ Eric Voegelin, “World-Empire and the Unity of Mankind,” *International Affairs* 38, no. 2 (April 1962), 170–188, 147–159.

⁵ Eric Voegelin, “World Empire and the Unity of Mankind,” *Collected Works*, Vol. 11, in *Published Essays: 1953–1965*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (University of Missouri Press, 2000), 134–155.

subsumes them. Mass men have abdicated personal responsibility for enactments of the whole. Victims and executioners have become interchangeable when they neither mount a personal resistance nor accept responsibility for the consequences. They have sunk below the level of actors once they have become mere instruments. Both Hannah Arendt and Eric Voegelin were in the process of defining converging perspectives on this totalitarian abyss at the time of their celebrated exchange.⁶ By becoming blind instruments, human beings could avoid responsibility and yet retain a sense of historical grandiosity. This was what the Gnostic schemas provided: an all-purpose ideological licence to do whatever they had determined to do. Voegelin’s pronouncement of that judgement was inseparable from opposing and resisting the loss of the person that was simultaneously the fate of the perpetrators of evil and those who were their victims.

Equally inseparable is the recognition of regimes that place individual responsibility and inviolability at the core of their *raison d’être*. Having seen how easily political societies resting on such a slender thread as the idea of liberty can yield to the worst impulses of human nature, Voegelin (and Arendt) were each inclined not to rely too heavily on the structures of liberal democracy. Even as they gave grudging respect to the constitutional regimes that had ensured their own personal safety, they could not quite entrust themselves to the virtue of fellow citizens who might one day prove as perfidious as those they had left behind. Nevertheless, the inexorable logic of the arguments they followed compelled them in that direction. Without embracing the cause of liberty, they reluctantly and hesitantly marshalled the arguments that would sustain it. Liberal political principles that had betrayed them in their hour of greatest need seemed unworthy of their full support. Yet they could not deny the integrity of the person whose defence lay at their core. Authoritarian forms might be enlisted as a temporary measure but only so long as they eventually lead to the development of citizens who could assume responsibility for their own welfare and that of others. Perhaps unwittingly, Voegelin, along with Strauss and Arendt, became not just friends of democracy but the kind of friends who prove their mettle in mounting a defence of regimes not always capable of doing

⁶ “The Origins of Totalitarianism,” *Published Essays: 1953–1965*, 15–23. Originally in *Review of Politics* 15 (1953), as a review essay on Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Harcourt, Brace, 1951).

it themselves.⁷ That was certainly the thrust of Voegelin's later reflection on world empire and the unity of mankind. There, he argued, not on constitutional grounds, but on existential ones, that a civilisation that had instrumentalised its own citizens could neither endure nor succeed. They had lost that precious freedom of thought and action that marks them as persons who bear responsibility for their existence. By allowing themselves to become mere instruments, they expose the Faustian bargain that is at the core of the Gnostic dream of power without purpose. Inner conversion is the only form of progress that is worthy of the name, as the classic philosophers and the Church Fathers understood so well. For a genuine reform to take place, freedom is its indispensable condition. Neither cheap grace nor the short circuit of revolution can provide a substitute. Only the inner change of heart draws us closer to the eschatological truth of history that defines universal humanity.⁸

World empire without a transcendent telos, on Voegelin's account, is neither a world nor an empire. It is simply a power organisation without purpose, for the latter can only be gained through the willingness to transcend itself. The Gnostic end of history within time would abolish history without effecting the perfection of human nature it proclaimed. Mendacity had reached its limit when men dreamt of systems so perfect that no one would need to be good.⁹ In the account of Gnosticism in *The New Science*, it is arguable that Voegelin was in the early stages of working out these relationships between the openness to history and its foreclosure, which he would later declare as the path of "universal humanity" in *The Ecumenic Age*.¹⁰ Paradise on earth would become a hell on earth when there was no longer any need to struggle towards the spiritual transfiguration glimpsed, yet never attained, in the opening towards the transcendent that had become the pivot of history. External conformity, in the case of Hobbes, was all that would be left to ensure a civil peace that served nothing higher than its own

preservation.¹¹ Constraint of enthusiasts, who were convinced of their own messianic role in bringing about a perfection they had not attained themselves, would bear witness to an ideological fervour that sought to conceal the lie of its impossibility. The latter was the pattern of the Gnostic radicals that Voegelin saw as the forerunners of the totalitarian regimes that would succeed them; the former was the option that Hobbes had laid out as the only realistic path for visionaries who would neither submit to limits nor accept any in their demand for perfection. Almost lost in these later chapters of *The New Science*, focused as they are on extreme cases, was the more intermediate option of muddling through that would eventually yield a distinctly non-perfectionistic and anti-utopian style of politics. I say *almost* lost because, in fact, Voegelin's own analysis exemplifies a politics of limited expectations, without acknowledging it.¹²

The position from which his argument unfolds is thoroughly imbued, despite his own protestations to the contrary, with the restraint that would countenance a politics rooted in imperfection. To denounce the spirit of "modernity without restraint", one must already occupy the position of its opposite. That is exactly the position sketched by Voegelin in the first three chapters that culminate in his admiration for the concision of Lincoln's formula of "government of the people, by the people, for the people". It is premised on the opening of the soul that occurs in classical philosophy, by which every person becomes capable of participating in the life of reason to a sufficient, if not complete, extent. To this was added the Christian differentiation of grace that acknowledged the limitations of human nature left to its own resources. The prospects for a regime of liberty, composed of self-governing individuals imbued with respect for the moral law and the rights of one another, were always going to be fragile. But Voegelin held onto that faith that he glimpsed in the era of Greek tragedy, especially as exemplified in the *Suppliants* of Aeschylus.¹³ However, it was the process of state formation that he studied in the late medieval period that demonstrated the logic of truth and representation by which society becomes articulate down to the level of every individual and is in turn

⁷ That task was left up to their students. See, in particular, the work of Ellis Sandoz, Harry Jaffa, Walter Berns, and Martin Diamond.

⁸ "Christian compromise with the world has assumed the form of the Church that is neither an empire nor a community living in expectation of an imminent end of the world, but an institution representing the eschatological telos within the world." Voegelin, "World Empire and the Unity of Mankind," 152.

⁹ T. S. Eliot, "Choruses from 'The Rock'," Section VI, in *The Complete Poems and Plays 1909-1950*, T. S. Eliot (Harcourt, Brace, 1971), 106.

¹⁰ Eric Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age, Collected Works*, ed. Michael Franz, Vol. 17 (University of Missouri Press, 2000), Chapter 7, "Universal Humanity."

¹¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, and Voegelin's treatment in *The New Science of Politics*, Chapter 5.

¹² "These phenomena, the dynamics of the revolution, however, do not affect its nature; and the nature can, indeed, be studied best in its radical expressions where it is not obscured by compromises with the exigencies of political success." Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, Chapter 5, section 4.

¹³ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, Chapter 2, section 7.

sustained by the moral maturity that enables them to act together. John Fortescue was his invaluable guide to that process in which a political community orders itself for existence and submits to a natural and divinely willed order beyond them.¹⁴ Voegelin's invocation of the Lincolnian formula was only a culminating abbreviation for a long process of political formation that was far less aptly developed in the later social contract theorists. The implicit unfolding of liberty in practice, especially as sketched by Fortescue, is in many ways more suggestive of Voegelin's own allegiance even if he rarely explicates it in his work. To gain that fuller perspective, we must take account of what moved him at the deepest level.

Revulsion at the Murder of the Superfluous

While not always visible on the scholarly surface, the motivation of the work occasionally breaks through in his revulsion at the readiness to sacrifice actual human beings for the sake of the abstraction of ideology. The love of humanity and the hatred of individuals is the contradiction he could not abide. Something of Voegelin's visceral reaction to this deformation of the person is vividly on display in his vignette on Auguste Comte. What particularly incensed him was Comte's notion of the judgement of history, an immanentist version of the Last Judgement, by which those who had been found wanting as contributors to humanity were not only forgotten but were erased from history. One can detect the horror in Voegelin's characterisation of it as "those 'holes of oblivion' into which the divine redeemers of the Gnostic empires drop their victims with a bullet in the neck".¹⁵ Unlike Milton's depiction of Adam and Eve released into history "with a paradise within them, happier far", there is "little to cheer in meditation on the not so happy end" of the Gnostic paradise. We begin to see that the human spirit has shrivelled to the instrumentality that advances or fails to advance the goals of progressive civilisation. The persons who no longer transcend the role history has assigned them can have no further significance within a mundane calculus of their worth. This is surely the meaning of the most striking observation that follows in the text: "The death of the spirit is the price of progress".¹⁶ Nietzsche,

¹⁴ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, Chapter 1, section 6.

¹⁵ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, Chapter 4, section 5.

¹⁶ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, Chapter 4, section 5.

Voegelin contends, is the one who diagnoses the situation when he announces not only that God is dead but that he has been murdered. By stating this, he is not complaining about the loss of faith in a transcendent God. It is rather a lament for the human person who now has no significance beyond the mundane framework: "The more fervently all human energies are thrown into the great enterprise of salvation through world immanent action, the farther the human beings who engage in this enterprise move away from the life of the spirit".

It is the defence of human beings now become superfluous, once their contributions have been tabulated, that animates Voegelin's great critique of modernity. He is rightly appalled by the scale of dehumanisation implied. The shock of the concentration camps and the scale of the Holocaust do not have the impact on him that they had on so many of his contemporaries.¹⁷ Voegelin had already traced the spiritual desolation from which such physical destruction flowed. He could perceive the line from the murder of God to the murder of man. When there is no God, there is nothing exalted about man, who now becomes raw material for manipulation and exploitation. Progress achieved at the price of its putative beneficiaries ceases to be progress in any meaningful sense. This is why Voegelin declared that, although a civilisation can advance and decline at the same time, it cannot do so indefinitely: "A limit is reached when an activist sect which represents the Gnostic truth organizes the civilization into an empire under its rule. Totalitarianism, defined as the existential rule of Gnostic activists, is the end form of progressive civilization".¹⁸ This was the issue that Voegelin teased out with increasing precision in the later "World-Empire" essay. Without reference to Gnosticism, he simply declared that "an empire, in order to be a world, requires participation of its order in transcendent Being".¹⁹ No mundane apocalypse could represent universal humanity that in any event was extended, not only in space but most significantly over time. The attempts at "transforming the ecumene into a 'world' are doomed to failure; what can be achieved is only the apocalyptic concentration camp".²⁰

¹⁷ The trauma of Arendt's reaction seems palpable. See Thomas Holman, "Hannah Arendt and Eric Voegelin on the Totalitarianism and the Person," Ph.D. dissertation, submitted to The Catholic University of America (2024), for a fuller account.

¹⁸ Holman, "Hannah Arendt and Eric Voegelin on the Totalitarianism and the Person".

¹⁹ Voegelin, "World Empire and the Unity of Mankind," 154.

²⁰ Voegelin, "World Empire and the Unity of Mankind," 154.

Inability to Explicate the Source of His Own Conviction

The abyss of dehumanisation was a spiritual event long before its totalitarian horror had become visible. This was what made Voegelin's own effort of resistance even more significant. Yet it cannot be said that the result measured up to the promise of its beginning. While Voegelin correctly identified the abolition of God as the prelude to the abolition of man, he remained silent about the faith that had underpinned his own formidable analysis. He may have understood that his thought pointed in the direction of a rebirth of the spirit in a world cut off from its transcendent measure, but he was hard-pressed to discern a way in which that implication could be realised in practice. His own detachment from any of the historical faith communities, whether in church or in the political realm, may have played a role. He rightly excoriated the cowardice and compromise of their institutional leadership, but he overlooked the extent to which the glimmerings of a rebirth of the spirit were always underway even in the darkest days of the nightmare. Neither Bonhoeffer nor the White Rose martyrs, nor the rise of Christian democratic parties, nor the advent of a human rights bulwark against future deformations, appeared to make an impact on his radar.²¹ This is all the more regrettable given that his formidable analysis of representative humanity was already an opening to the realm of the spirit beyond any mundane power organisation. Despite the reverence he holds for the transcendent dignity of the person, it seemed not to connect with the reaffirmation of liberal democratic convictions that were so palpably the order of the day.²² Instead, he contents himself with observing that the era of imperial representation of universal humanity has reached its end and that of "the new forms we know no more than the prefigurations I have tried to sketch."²³ Regimes that reverence the transcendence of the person, that are instituted for the

²¹ Josef Pieper, by contrast, admits when he learned how much of an impact his thought had had on the Scholl siblings, that he felt ashamed. "Some write things, others do them." *Journey to Point Omega: An Autobiography*, trans. Dan Farrelly (St. Augustine Press, 2020), 143. I am indebted to Morgan Whitmer, "Liberty, Liberal Education, and Leisure in Josef Pieper," Ph.D. dissertation, The Catholic University of America (2024) for this striking reference.

²² For a small illustration of the rebirth of liberal political thought and practice, see the genesis of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Mary Ann Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Random House, 2002).

²³ Voegelin, "World Empire and the Unity of Mankind," 155.

express purpose of guarding it, are simply not noted. By looking towards new carriers of his own conviction, he overlooks the ones taking place. Thus, his own greatest contribution to the philosophic truth at their core is also diminished.

Voegelin's insight into the transcendent horizon of existence, a conviction that made him an implacable foe of every instrumentalisation of the person, does not even appear to him as one of the foundations towards which he looks. It is a regrettable shortcoming of his probing reflections that they fail to connect with the imperatives towards which they inexorably point. That is, that the apocalypse of history is not an event in history but the event that constitutes every single person within it. Whether it is his disdainful treatment of Kant's invocation of the dignity of the person, or Jaspers's contemporaneous search for universal humanity in the axial age, it is hard to resist the observation that Voegelin never fully capitalised on the direction towards which his thought continually strained.²⁴ Even his concession of the deadly impact of the apocalyptic and Gnostic dreamers and his suggestion that they may "have a cathartic function in the historical process"²⁵ is not quite enough for him to see that the event has already begun in his own critique. Resistance to disorder is already the beginning of order, he constantly reminds us, in his treatment of classical philosophy. But is the same not true in his own heroic witness to the same imperative? Mysteriously, he held back from the full affirmation of what he firmly believed. Neither able to rest his faith in political movements or in spiritual communities that had disappointed him, Voegelin seems strangely resolved to go his own way as the voice of a prophet crying in the wilderness. The motto from Hooker, which adorns *The New Science*, that "posterity may know we have not loosely through silence permitted things to pass away as in a dream," seems to express those limits. But is there not in the end an obligation placed on every prophet not to quench the flickering flame but to fan it into light? Expressions of admiration for regimes that have retained the spiritual substance of constitutional order are not quite the same as a rejuvenation of the convictions that underpin them in practice, if not in theory. In the case of one of the most penetrating thinkers of the age, who might well have performed the inestimable public service of articulating the roots of liberty and responsibility, this shortcoming is all the more

²⁴ See the "Foreword" by Christopher Thornhill to the Routledge Classics edition of Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, trans. Michael Bullock (Routledge, 2021).

²⁵ Voegelin, "World Empire and the Unity of Mankind," 155.

remarkable. Liberal regimes have been left to limp along with defences that might otherwise have become more formidable. We may even be inclined to think that our own fragmented treatments of them could well have been avoided.²⁶

What might Voegelin have been able to accomplish if he had been able to stir up the depth of indignation from which his own thought flowed and yet never found articulate expression? There is no doubt that he conveyed much of that conviction beneath the cool exterior of historical analysis. He had an ear for the degradation of the person in Enlightenment philosophers, like Turgot, who could invent a term like “*masse totale*” without sensing the dehumanisation it implied. It was undoubtedly because of the association of that attitude with the liberal idea of progress that Voegelin lost the hope of finding a deeper affinity within historical regimes of liberty. Not all of his revulsion can be said to derive from the bitter experience of liberal political failure both in Germany and in the wider West before the Second World War. He simply could not see the possibility of a hidden reserve that might be reactivated within regimes that only seemed erected, as T. S. Eliot surmised in 1938, on nothing more than “a belief in compound interest and the maintenance of dividends”.²⁷ The changes that could occur in individuals and societies of unmitigated shallowness had not yet become perceptible. This was surely why he overlooked the formidable role of the great martyrs of the concentration camps and of the totalitarian age, a witness that would continue to bear fruit in the post-ideological age, which would, albeit imperfectly, emerge.²⁸ Nor could he give credit for the constitutional rehabilitation that occurred in Germany with the *Grundgesetz* after the war, as part of a wider effort of liberal democracies to rededicate themselves to the defence of the dignity of the person in light of the massive assault that had occurred. In the postwar period when

²⁶ When I published *The Growth of the Liberal Soul* (University of Missouri Press, 1997), I was very much aware that it went contrary to Voegelin’s long unchallenged view of liberal democracy as a halfway house on the road to totalitarianism.

²⁷ T. S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (Harcourt, Brace, 1940), 65.

²⁸ Only in the hindsight of history do we realize what an impact dissidents had on seemingly all-powerful regimes, which, even in repression, trembled before heroic witnesses that would not bend the knee. They included not only such famous cases as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Scholl siblings but even such silenced witnesses as Franz Jägerstätter, Etty Hillesum, Victor Frankl, Edith Stein, and Primo Levi. The inability of totalitarian regimes to silence them is the most significant aspect. I tried to sketch that context in *After Ideology: Recovering the Spiritual Foundations of Freedom* (Harper San Francisco, 1990), in which the spectacular case of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was a centrepiece. To that number, we must now add the incomparable witness of the Charter 77 group with Vaclav Havel and now the Charter ’08 group of Liu Xiaobao.

Voegelin delivered his *Hitler and the Germans*, remembrance of what had been done and repentance of the atrocities committed in the name of the nation was only beginning. Condemnation of the wider complicity of German society, as he exposed it, was itself connected with the remedial effort that must be an inevitable accompaniment.

As an observer of history, Voegelin was peculiarly detached from his own role in remediating it. Yet that was in large measure the purpose of his work. Only occasionally, do flashes of indignation at the injustices inflicted break through. Then, it is evident that his bedrock remained that no tally of future benefits could compensate for the annihilation of the human beings involved. Good consequences never made evil actions good.²⁹ It was in this way that Voegelin remained true to the intuition that the judgement of history never outweighed the judgement of eternity. The closest he came to articulating this is in his treatment of the mundane apocalypse that masqueraded as the transcendent truth of the spirit. Whether it was the Gnostic revolutionaries or the ecumenic conquerors, Voegelin had an unwavering eye for the victims slaughtered in the name of a putative eschaton. What he could not quite explain is whence that sensitivity had arisen. Nor could he see how regimes that were devoted to the inexhaustible dignity and worth of each person could be sustained on nothing more than that conviction itself. Like many great thinkers, he failed to see how the greatness of soul he personally exemplified could become publicly paradigmatic. The luminosity that guided his own piercing observations of history seemed to lie outside of it, or at least outside of the correctly eschatological perspective he had already brought to bear on it. This is why it is so important for us to uncover the animating centre of Voegelin’s own thought as he grappled with the mystery of iniquity within history that had masqueraded as the highest claim to divinity within it.

Persons cannot be killed without killing oneself.

The reason why he could not be taken in by the false righteousness that exchanged evil for good is that Voegelin had already inured himself against mendacity. Taking his stand on implacable truth, he could not be lulled into calling evil good or good

²⁹ Something Voegelin drew from Jacob Burckhardt in his 1868 lectures *On the Study of History*. See the discussion in Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, Chapter 3, section 3, “Jacob Burckhardt and the Process of History.”

evil. This is something he explains in the few pages of the *Autobiographical Reflections* where, very likely prompted by Ellis Sandoz, he discloses the deepest motivations of his work. From the beginning, he could see that ideology was incompatible with a rational account of reality at the core of science. But to this, Voegelin added a distinctly moral dimension. It was not simply that contact with reality was lost but that it opened the way to the perpetration of evil on a vast scale. His hatred of National Socialism, he explains, was “a quite primitive one. I have an aversion to killing people for the fun of it. What the fun is I did not quite understand at the time, but in the intervening years, the ample exploration of revolutionary consciousness has cast some light on this matter. The fun consists in gaining a pseudo-identity through asserting one’s power, optimally by killing somebody --- a pseudo-identity that serves as a substitute for the human self that has been lost”.³⁰ What is notable about this passage is that its moral force does not draw upon any explication of principles but stands as a premoral conviction that precedes all human conversation. It is the spirituality of practice, not that of theory. It does not even draw on Voegelin’s own invocation of an openness to transcendent being. Nor is there any wider reference to a common order of limits or of mutual recognition of rights, and certainly nothing about the equal dignity of human beings made in the image of God. It simply stands as the bold and bald expression of a bedrock from which a man cannot be moved. In every sense, it is pre-credal. Yet it exercises an authority that reaches out to us and in which we recognise its representative significance. It is that foundation in living life that makes all living together possible and yet itself escapes further specification. We recognise the voice everywhere in Voegelin’s works, and so we are all the more grateful to hear it in his own voice.

In the end, Voegelin is moved to mount a stunning defence of the human person who cannot be cast aside in the name of an abstract historical goal. History for him is the apocalypse of the person who, in every instance, exceeds it. Yet Voegelin’s own failure to more fully articulate the motivating core of his work is one of the reasons he never emerges as a defender of the rights and dignity of the person. The multi-layered complexity of his thought must be penetrated by careful readers who can discern the animating centre that, once it is perceived, shines radiantly over it

³⁰ Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections* (University of Missouri Press, 2011), Chapter 14.

all. “I have an aversion to killing people” is one of those exclamations uttered when the surface of scientific detachment parts to reveal a depth of astonishing intensity. We are almost inclined to suggest that it is comparable to the pattern that we witness within liberal political thought as a whole. The defence of liberty arises not as a philosophical principle but as a visceral response to the jeopardy that looms over it. But once we become aware of it, we can understand the passionate defence that is provoked even on occasions that seem largely removed from it. A case in point is surely his “overreaction” to Husserl’s celebrated *Crisis of the European Sciences*. In his letter to Alfred Schütz, Voegelin offers an intemperate reaction that is in surprising contrast to the admiration each had previously displayed towards Husserl.³¹ Despite the fact that their theoretical apparatus remained steeped in the phenomenological approach, Voegelin could not bring himself to overlook the impression generated by Husserl’s sketch of a history of philosophy culminating in his own work. Voegelin’s acute sensitivity to all progressivist constructions had been honed on the realisation that they relegate all predecessors to mere stepping-stones to the present. Husserl may not have become a totalitarian, but he had fostered an alibi that could justify inhumanity on a mass scale. When reading it, we might be inclined to think that it was a response out of proportion to the minor self-inflation contained in Husserl’s sketch. But there is nothing minor, Voegelin seems to say, in the intimation that some human beings have been judged to have exhausted their historical significance. Superfluous persons can and will be cast aside.

We begin to understand why Voegelin revised the chronological framework that had dominated the first three volumes of *Order and History* to assume the mutuality of his later philosophy of consciousness.³² Partners in a dialogue, one that stretches across time, seemed far preferable to the implication of mastery that a final narrator always seems to possess. The spectator view of history was replaced by the conversational approach in which the past questions the present just as much as the reverse. As always, Voegelin’s weak spot remains his inability to conceive the political expression of that insight. His own observation of the lack of an institutional carrier

³¹ “A Letter to Alfred Schütz Concerning Edmund Husserl,” in *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics, Collected Works*, Vol. 6, trans. M.I. Hanak, Gerhart Niemeyer, ed. David Walsh (University of Missouri Press, 2002), 45–61.

³² Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, “Introduction,” especially the concluding section.

of the breakthrough to transcendence in the Ecumenic Age never quite matched his insights into the Sacrum Imperium that balanced spiritual and temporal order in the medieval period. As a result, he was never able to discern the extent to which that equilibrium was transmitted into the modern period through the formation of constitutional regimes of self-restraint. Despite the fact that the elements were assembled in his account of the rise of parliament, especially the connection between taxation and representation, they never reached theoretical awareness.³³ Later, when Locke and the Americans elevated it to a principle of political liberty, it seemed to emerge out of nowhere, especially since the actors themselves were incapable of retrieving the historical memory that now acted upon them silently and, perhaps all the more powerfully, for that reason. It was left to a later generation of scholars, admittedly not part of the Voegelin circle, to regain the historical memory more concretely.³⁴ Yet despite that oversight, one that scholarship had still not fully addressed at the time of his work, there remained a far deeper intuition that survived in Voegelin's thought. The trauma of the collapse of liberal regimes into totalitarianism may have proved too much even for Voegelin to dwell on it as the only alternative path out of them. Yet it has become the pattern for such later dissidents as Václav Havel and the Charter 77 group, who also knew something of life under such governments. Instead, Voegelin clung to the notion of an alternative modernity in the line of heroes, like Bodin, Schelling, and Bergson, who, while they did not capture the mainline, contained the promise of a spiritually more expansive version.

The Postulate of Balance That Resists the Magic of the Extreme

The only place where that promise had been delivered was in the postulate of balance that Voegelin discerned in the classic philosophers, notably Plato.³⁵ That too suggested to him that the political model was to be found outside of the makeshift

efforts liberal political practice had historically cobbled together. It is striking too that he did not return to Christianity, which, despite the surface connection with the apocalypse, had adopted the most virulently anti-apocalyptic stand once the Church understood itself as mediating the divine presence in history. What was left for the political community to mediate once that happened was undoubtedly a source of complication. The two swords of the medieval balance were one form of a cooperative arrangement, but they were by no means the only one. It is at least arguable that a separation between Church and state that opens the space of mutual recognition, in which the transcendent destiny of every individual may be acknowledged, provides a viable, flexible, and more universal one. Its germ is surely present in Voegelin's insistence that the process of history becoming luminous does not abolish the process. Even those who are vouchsafed the divine revelation do not escape the historical destiny that is the fate of all human beings. Death is the price of life. Nor can anyone claim mastery over the whole in which they find themselves. The divine right of kings ceases to function in any way that reduces all human beings to the state of radical equality under the divine King. Echoes of Locke's *First Treatise* are not coincidental. All men are born free and equal and can only be placed under the authority to whom they have consented, while the latter derive their authority not only from consent but, more importantly, from the divine and natural law that binds all as equals.

Without declaring it, Voegelin had laid his finger on the principle that lies at the heart of a liberal regime of self-government. The only model of its political implementation may have been in the age of Tragedy, especially the emblematic case of the *Suppliants*, where collective decision-making is exemplified. But the principle remained central to Voegelin's account of the Platonic best regime, an idea that would seem to invite its imperial extension. Yet neither Plato nor Aristotle had embraced the idea that the apogee of politics consists of ruling over others without their consent.³⁶ They could accept the untidy consequences that are the inevitable outcome of countenancing regimes of free self-government. In this observation, we are very close to the example of the "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor", where Christ alone is the one who is prepared to pay the price for human freedom most irrevocably.³⁷ While Voegelin could not find his way to that consummate affirmation, he came

³³ Eric Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, Vol. III, *The Later Middle Ages*, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, ed. David Walsh (University of Missouri Press, 1998), Chapter 19, "The English National Polity."

³⁴ Quentin Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Vol. 1, *The Renaissance*, and Vol. 2, *The Age of Reformation* (Cambridge University Press, 1978).

³⁵ Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, Chapter 4, "Conquest and Exodus," especially section 3, "Balance of Consciousness."

³⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, Book VII, Chapter 2.

³⁷ Walsh, *The Growth of the Liberal Soul*, 219–233.

very close to it in recognising Plato's project as the exemplification of a best regime doomed to last only as a temporary achievement. Historically, it could only remain as the permanent invitation for each polis to reform itself in light of the best and thereby make it possible to enter into a federated ethnos that would prove a sufficient counterweight to the model of imperial power.³⁸ The paradigmatic order sketched in the *Republic* could forever establish the principle that men are ruled rightly only when they are ruled in accordance with the divine element within them. The order of the soul and the order of the cosmos converge in a way that seems so self-evident we are inclined to overlook it. Yet it is the key both to republican self-government and the possibility of building alliances that can withstand the nightmare of a world driven only by imperial ambitions lacking all substance. It is hard to say that the empirical course of history in recent times has demonstrated any contrary path. Men can be bound together only when they can be bound by the golden chord of Nous.

Sounding the alarm about liberal regimes that, for all their defects, have remained a historical success, Voegelin was still unable to find his way towards the clear-eyed assessment his own thought seemed to demand. Perhaps a certain disdain for the grubbiness of practical politics had left him incapable of appreciating the untidiness of self-organising ordinary citizens. This particularly extended to the thinkers who managed to enunciate the imperfect perspectives of the common man in the simplistic formulas offered by a John Locke or a John Stuart Mill.³⁹ But not all of the disdain can be attributed to the trauma of his own narrow escape when the world of liberal blindness and self-assurance came crashing down. Somehow Voegelin's own withering critique of German society had not quite reached the equanimity from which the monstrous events could be viewed rightly. Perhaps this was why his bracing critique of "Hitler and the Germans" never reached a condition he could

regard as worthy of publication. A more than objective account would be needed in order to do justice to the question of mastering an unmastered past. Collective self-examination would have to include the observer himself. Critique would have to include self-critique, to include the question Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn raises at a culminating point in the *Gulag Archipelago* when he asks, "So were *we* any better?"⁴⁰ Was there more that I might have done, for which forgiveness must be sought? The fragility of an order of liberty places the burden of responsibility on all who become aware of it. We cannot sit back and complain without taking whatever steps we can to remediate and restore it. The silent crumbling of mutual responsibility begins within each of us, who now must perceive and accept our own part within the whole. Repentance cannot exclude self-repentance.⁴¹

This is the logic of all dissidents who not only say no but begin the task of rebuilding with the unbidden generosity that enlarges the heart. It is for this reason that they evince a remarkable pattern of incrementally, if not explicitly, embracing the only regime that locates the inviolable dignity and worth of every person as its centre. The equal rights and dignity of every person ceases to be an abstraction, for it is the precondition of all genuine mutuality. None can sink to the level of a blind instrument, for each is an incomparable end in himself. There are no superfluous human beings who may be disposed of as if their precious lives could be snuffed out without the slightest misgiving. All are bound up with all in that mutuality of persons that is at the heart of any free society, one that serves no higher purpose than the reverence properly accorded to each member. Valued for their own sake, none can sink to the level of a mere means that exhausts who they are. The transcendence of the person is publicly recognised in the kind of politics built around that recognition.⁴² The inviolable freedom and dignity of each come into view only when we begin to acknowledge their existential hold on each of us. Voegelin's shortcoming was not that he could not perceive the growth of the soul to which we are invited. It was, curiously, that he could not see the political form it would have to take. Only in a free society is that enlargement of the heart possible, as it is only in such a

³⁸ "The construction of the [Platonic] paradigm must not be separated from its purpose of providing a constitution for the member-polis of a functioning federation. Moreover, this Hellenic federation is supposed to hold its own against Persia; in the power field of the time it is to be a match to the ecumenic empire, as the earlier Doric federation was the European counterweight to the "Assyria" in the back ground [*sic*] of Troy (*Laws* 685c)". See Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, Chapter 3, "Conquest and Exodus," section 2, "Plato on History." It is difficult to read this passage without suspecting that it intuitively points toward the conception of the NATO alliance whose members bear a common allegiance to the principles of free self-government.

³⁹ We might recall that Mill firmly rejected the totalitarian implications of Comte's *Religion of Humanity*, thereby demonstrating that liberal principles are not doomed to end in that inhumane abyss.

⁴⁰ Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, trans. Thomas Whitney (Harper and Row, 1975), in the famous chapter on "The Ascent," 616. For a discussion, see *After Ideology*, 150.

⁴¹ Liu Xiaobo, *No Enemies, No Hatred*, ed. Perry Link (The Belknap Press, 2013).

⁴² Walsh, *Politics of the Person as the Politics of Being* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2016).

society that a politics built upon that principle can be undertaken. Perhaps we might say that Voegelin could intuit the liberty that Tocqueville understood as the art of association, yet he could not fully embrace the unfolding towards which he was called. He possessed the Tocquevillian faith in liberty without knowing what it was. Perhaps, in the end, Voegelin must be listed as an “anonymous liberal”.

It is enough that he so firmly resisted any hint of measuring persons in light of their mundane contributions or lack of them. The end never justifies the means because the individual human beings so regarded never sink to the level of a mere means. At the same time, Voegelin was a consummate realist who sought to remain a spiritual realist. Political necessity might, in the words of Machiavelli, “excuse” certain means that could never be justified in purely moral terms.⁴³ Evil means may even bring about good results, but that could never amount to a moral justification. It was his ability to hew closely to that line that defined what it meant to be a spiritual realist who never allowed the mundane perspective to overshadow the transcendent dimension of every person within it. Even if he was not a liberal, Voegelin remained a personalist for whom the judgement of political reality must ultimately turn on the incommensurability of every single person. Neither the classical aspiration towards the fulfilment of human nature nor the Christian invocation of perfection beyond this life could dislodge him from the bedrock importance of serving concrete human beings within it. Transfiguration may have been the finality of the revelatory outbursts, especially in the Pauline vision of the resurrected, but it could neither be anticipated nor effected within time. The realm of politics remained in the Metaxy, that intermediate condition that could neither be completed nor supplanted. Within that horizon, the best that could be expected was the development of moderately decent regimes fully aware of the abyss of evil that might at any moment consume them. The transcendent worth of every single person must constrain the power of government consistent with our inability to foresee the limits that might occasionally be breached. In every respect, this viewpoint is difficult to distinguish from the range of oscillations that characterise the world of liberal democratic practice and experience.

Voegelin's Recapture of Reality as Personal Encounter

JOHN VON HEYKING

We have been invited to respond to Eric Voegelin's claim, made in his *Autobiographical Reflections*, to philosophise in order to “recapture reality!”¹ His endeavour to have “recourse to thinkers of the past who had not lost reality, or who were engaged in the effort of regaining it” was aimed precisely at inoculating himself and his students and readers against the ideological “secondary realities” that plague modern life. As he states in Volume One of *Order and History*, his *œuvre* “should be read, not as an attempt to explore curiosities of the past, but as an inquiry into the structure of the order in which we live presently”.²

Voegelin developed a variety of symbols and terms to express the ways ideologies, and before them, the various pathologies of soul, deform human existence, including “secondary reality”, “pneumopathology”, and older symbols including “alienation”, “stupidity”, and “*nosos*”. Key to all of them is the personal responsibility we all have to avoid these conditions and to live in the light of truth,

¹ Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections, Revised Edition with a Voegelin Glossary and Cumulative Index*, in *Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol. 34, ed. Ellis Sandoz (University of Missouri Press, 2006), 118–26.

² Eric Voegelin, *Israel and Revelation, Order and History I* (Louisiana State University Press, 1956), 295.

⁴³ “He will agree that if his deed accuses him, its consequences excuse him.” Machiavelli, Chapter 9, *The Discourses on Livy*, in *Machiavelli: Selected Political Writings*, trans. David Wooten (Hackett, 1994).

not only under God but to ourselves and to our neighbours. To do otherwise is an act of betrayal.

At the root of many modern ideologies is that they have forgotten the sense of personal responsibility towards others that is so central to how the ancients regarded just political conduct. I want to address this problem by considering Voegelin's treatment of the greatest of all proponents of betrayal, ancient or modern, Machiavelli, and consider how, by "recourse to thinkers of the past", one can patch up the wounds he and his epigones inflicted upon us, intentionally and unintentionally.

In his chapter on Machiavelli in the *History of Political Ideas*, Voegelin indicates personal responsibility as the nub of the problem. In the chapter's conclusion, he claims, "Philosophically, the problem of Machiavelli's ethics consists in nothing but the recognition of the elementary fact that the existence of man is burdened with conflicts of values".³ The Platonic insight that doing evil is worse than suffering evil is a spiritual value that, if left as the dominant political value, leads to ruin:

Since the existence of man is social, his actions are burdened with the responsibility for their effects on the values realized in the lives of other men. A statesman who does not answer an attack on his country with the order to shoot back will not be praised for the spiritual refinement of his morality in turning the other cheek, but he will justly be cursed for his criminal irresponsibility. Spiritual morality is a problem in human existence, precisely because there is a good deal more to human existence than spirit.⁴

The seven mentions of the word "existence" in the above-cited paragraph illuminate the question of "conflicts of values" as an existential question for human beings, of which the statesman's personal responsibility for "human existence, the existence of the community, and the civilizational values realized in community" is

³ Eric Voegelin, *Renaissance and Reformation, History of Political Ideas IV, Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol. 22, eds. David L. Morse and William M. Thompson (University of Missouri Press, 1998), 82.

⁴ Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, 82.

paramount. For Machiavelli, the question of fame or infamy and of effectual truth is the existential question of personal responsibility, just as the Platonic question of whether doing evil is worse than suffering evil is the other side of that question. For this reason, Voegelin, by juxtaposing Machiavelli's prince with Plato's philosophizing, presents them as posing the same question of our spiritual and political existence: "The evocation of the mythical hero is the center of Machiavelli's work in the same sense in which the evocation of the philosopher-king is the center of Plato's work. Machiavelli has created a myth; this fact must be the basis of interpretation if we wish to avoid misunderstanding his theory of politics as the insight that foul means are frequently more helpful in acquiring power than fair ones".⁵

My effort to consider betrayal as the entry point into Voegelin's call to recapture reality focuses on the person. It is appropriate to do so here in this beautiful city of Budapest. As Victor Sebestyen writes in his recent history of Budapest, the sense of betrayal and being betrayed weaves through Hungarian history and self-understanding when the West forsook Hungary to face the Mongolians, "when the Turks occupied [...] in the sixteenth century, the Austrians suppressed an independence movement in the nineteenth-century, when the Soviet Union savagely put down a revolution in the twentieth". Sebestyen quotes the poet Sándor Petőfi's proclamation, "We are the most forsaken of all peoples on the earth".⁶ More recently, Balázs Orbán has transformed this pessimism into a more optimistic and Machiavellian form of Hungarian *virtù*, which he calls the "Hussar cut": "[a] fast decisive, surprising, and at the same time reckless enterprise; an initiative or action that risks everything".⁷ It involves the willingness to change direction in foreign policy and alliances, a Machiavellian willingness to break faith at the turn of a hoof. The subtitle of Orbán's book is "The Hungarian Strategy for Connectivity", which implies the need at least to maintain the appearance of keeping faith while breaking it.

⁵ Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, 56.

⁶ Victor Sebestyen, *Budapest: Between East and West* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2022), 41.

⁷ Balázs Orbán, *Hussar Cut: The Hungarian Strategy for Connectivity* (MCC Press, 2024), 10.

Machiavellian Betrayal and Responsibility

Machiavelli famously declares, “all men [...] are wicked and do not observe faith with you, you also do not have to observe it with them. Nor does a prince ever lack legitimate causes to color his failure to observe faith”.⁸ A few lines later, he writes, “men are so simple and so obedient to present necessities that he who deceives will always find someone who will let himself be deceived”.⁹ By counselling breaking faith and seducing men with appearances, Machiavelli gives licence to the political use of what Voegelin calls “secondary realities”. I hasten to add that Machiavelli himself wrote *The Prince* because he worried that Christian princes and moralists indulged in moralistic illusions or secondary realities that led to the ruin of states while enabling rulers to evade personal responsibility for their rule. Part of the “effectual truth” Machiavelli seeks is for princes to take personal responsibility for their rule. The counsel for princes to love their republics more than their own souls is the starkest expression of this. He thus imparts a paradoxical teaching that counsels betrayal for the cause of keeping faith.

Voegelin addresses Machiavelli's spiritual realism near the conclusion of his chapter on Machiavelli in *The History of Political Ideas* when he associates Machiavelli's teaching with the older teaching that political foundings are drenched in blood, as in the exemplary cases of Romulus's fratricide of Remus and Cain's fratricide of Abel (Cain's progeny go on to found the first cities mentioned in the Hebrew Bible). Voegelin states:

Every political order is in some part an accident of existence. The mystery of existential cruelty and guilt is at the bottom of the best order; while the dictum that “power is evil” cannot be maintained without qualification, it is true if it is qualified as characterizing the component of the existential accident in order. By social convention this mystery of guilt is not admitted to public consciousness. A political thinker who through his work stimulates an uncomfortable awareness of this mystery will become unpopular with the intellectual retainers of an established order.¹⁰

One finds a parallel comment at the end of the Introduction of Leo Strauss's *Thoughts on Machiavelli*. There, he notes that America, and liberal democracy more broadly, was “founded in explicit opposition to Machiavellian principles”.¹¹ He continues by noting that political reality is more complex than Paine and those Voegelin calls “intellectual retainers” would admit. Voegelin even refers to liberal teaching about consent as a “swindle”.¹² This reflects more Voegelin's scepticism towards the theoretical cogency of immanentist “contract theory” than towards his fuller understanding of consent, which David Walsh, in his contribution to this volume, notes lies at the centre of Voegelin's reflections with his acknowledgement in *The New Science of Politics* that “the membership of the society has become politically articulate down to the last individual”.¹³ Strauss argues that America, and justice more broadly, depend on “her occasional deviation from them. [Machiavelli] would not hesitate to suggest a mischievous interpretation of the Louisiana Purchase and the fate of the Red Indians”, which Strauss explicitly compares to the exemplary fratricide of Remus.¹⁴

These comparable observations by Voegelin and Strauss show them to have understood very well the moralism behind contemporary calls for “decolonization”. While the wokesters are motivated by the Rousseauian nostalgia for the state of nature that led to the French Revolution, their energy is enabled by a moralistic liberalism—what Voegelin calls the “swindle of consent”—that tells the story of a just founding based on consent, at least, those who were around to offer their consent. Liberalism plays the same role in this drama as the Christian princes for whom Machiavelli had such disdain because the notion of consent papers over fratricidal foundings that give foundings their effect. One might say “settler ideology” plays the role of a contemporary unarmed prophet Savonarola in calling for the bonfire of the insatiable white supremacist, heteronormative, cis-gender, capitalist, patriarchal, and imperialist vanities.

¹¹ Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (University of Chicago Press, 1958), 13.

¹² Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, 37.

¹³ See Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint: The Political Religions; The New Science of Politics; and Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, *Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol. 5, ed. Manfred Henningsen (University of Missouri Press, 2000), 119; see also 111, 236.

¹⁴ Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 14.

⁸ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (The University of Chicago Press, 1998), XVIII.69.

⁹ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, VIII.70.

¹⁰ Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, 83.

Machiavelli's Teaching: Diabolical or Cassandra?

To get a sense of the magnitude of Machiavelli's diabolical teaching on betrayal, one needs to consider the teaching of betrayal by his great fellow Florentine, Dante, who represents the old modes and orders Machiavelli opposes. Dante reserves punishment for those who betray, i.e., traitors, in the tenth and lowest circle of Hell. Punishments follow the logic of *contrapasso* where the punishment of sin mirrors and even completes the logic of the sin: sinners receive explicitly what is implicit in their conscious aims. Betrayal is the most wicked of sins for a variety of reasons, but Dante emphasises that it represents the ultimate deformation of both intellect and will.

One sees already in Hell's first circle how the sin of lust, located primarily in the deformed appetite, distorts Francesca's intellect insofar as her poignant account of her downfall masks her deformed will by a series of self-justifications and illusions. So much worse are the secondary realities created by deformed intellect and will in the deepest tenth circle, where Dante in Canto 31, upon observing Nimrod, proclaims, "For where you join to evil and might/ the instrument of reason in the mind, no shelter for mankind can ever stand".¹⁵ A few lines later Virgil explains to Dante: "He incriminates himself./ He's Nimrod; owing to his evil plan there's no one language used in all the world./ Let's leave him and not toss our words away, for no one's ever heard the tongue he speaks, and every tongue is gibberish to him".¹⁶ Nimrod's gibberish expresses the opposite of the human intellect endowed with *logos*.

The next three cantos of *Inferno*, which are the final ones, find Virgil and Dante observing betrayers of kindred, of nation or party, of guests, and finally of benefactors, who are all frozen in the river Cocytus. The first region of the treacherous brothers, where the damned cannibalise their rivals, is Caina, named after the first fratricide: "And as a hunk of bread is chewed in hunger, so did the top soul tear his teeth into the other, where the neck adjoins the brain".¹⁷ In Canto 33, Virgil and Dante visit Antenora, the abode of betrayers of nation or party, and then Ptolomea, the abode of betrayers of guests. Antenora is named after Antenor, who ignored Cassandra and let the Greeks out of the Trojan Horse so they could enter

Troy. There, the two poets famously encounter Count Ugolino, who cannibalises in Hell in imitation of cannibalising his children while imprisoned by Archbishop Ruggieri of Pisa.

One of the curiosities in the next region, Ptolomea, which is named after the captain of Jericho who betrayed his father-in-law and cousins (1 Maccabees) and the brother of Cleopatra, who arranged for the murder of Pompey, is that souls may be damned to Hell but their bodies remain alive on earth: "The soul then falls headlong into this tank. Perhaps his body still appears above, the shade who chirps his winter song behind me".¹⁸ Dante describes betrayers as the living dead or the dead living, those whose intellects and wills have been so deformed that their souls may be said to have died while their bodies live on as if by inertia. Dante expresses his abhorrence at such treachery by giving us the image of the other who appear to us as the dead living. One sees an echo of the sentiment this image evokes in today's saying, somewhat cliché, that "you are dead to me". But one need only read accounts of those who have been betrayed, especially by political friends, to discern how that betrayal breeds a depersonalisation of relations and subsequent revulsion.

In the deepest pit of Hell, Satan presents a fearsome parody of the Trinity with his three sets of flapping wings, which create wind that freezes the ice, and three heads, each devouring the worst betrayers of them all (after Satan himself): Judas, Cassius, and Brutus. Their punishment is to be repeatedly shredded as if by a woodchipper for eternity. Dante's principle of *contrapasso* consists of the perpetually repeating disintegration of the sinners. Dante notes the silence of all those present, as it signifies the final stage of intellect's deformation where *logos* is null. Doré's sketch of the scene portrays a bored and slightly annoyed Satan.

Virgil and Dante must climb over Satan to exit Hell. He is a giant, even to giants, and the effort of climbing makes even Virgil the shade gasp in agony.¹⁹ Still ascending Satan's haunches, Dante expresses bewilderment at having been turned around in the exit: "I raised my eyes and thought that I would see Lucifer as I'd left him, but I saw his legs straight up in the air before me,/ And I was bewildered then, let those fog-headed people judge who do not see what was that point which I had

¹⁵ Dante, *Inferno*, trans. Anthony Esolen (Modern Library, 2005), 31.55–57.

¹⁶ Dante, *Inferno*, 31.77–82.

¹⁷ Dante, *Inferno*, 32.59, 127–29.

¹⁸ Dante, *Inferno*, 33.133–35.

¹⁹ Dante, *Inferno*, 34.78.

passed beyond”.²⁰ Contrary to the unrepentant souls condemned to Hell, Dante undergoes a conversion or turning-around to escape it and continue his journey to Purgatory.

Dante’s *Inferno*, with which Machiavelli was familiar, vividly presents images of persons whose moral substance Machiavelli was attacking, and with it, the magnitude of committing the injustices Machiavelli counsels for effective rule. With Dante’s images of the damned, we see in personal terms the enormity of the sins Machiavelli counsels the prince to commit. As a poet, Dante presents us with vivid images of the soul’s destruction, especially when it commits treason and betrayal.

Even so, Machiavelli might respond by pointing out that his counsel for breaking faith is a prudent response to those like Judas, Brutus, and Cassius, who first broke faith with their benefactors. *The Prince* is aimed at the benefactor who is expected to practise or appear to practise humanity, classically defined as regulating relations with social inferiors.²¹ This means the prince who breaks faith because he can expect his subjects already to have broken faith is simply punishing those who have already betrayed him. While they are like Judas, Brutus, and Cassius, the prince who breaks faith is at worst like Ptolomea who betrays his guests. Machiavelli seems to counsel committing the lesser evil to avoid not just the worst political evil of a ruined principate but also to avoid or even punish the worst spiritual evil. One must be like Ptolomea to avoid getting betrayed by Judas, Brutus, or Cassius and thereby become Satan. He compares one who betrays his country to a parricide.²² And turning the other cheek is worse than a solution because it induces one to commit the sin of Antenor, who let the Greeks into Troy.

Voegelin notes how the French invasion of 1494 produced generational trauma among Italians, who saw “the reality of power at the moment of its existential starkness when it destroys an order, when the destruction is a brute fact without sense, reason, or ideas. It is difficult to tell such men any stories about morality in politics [...]. Under this aspect a man like Machiavelli who theorizes on the basis of his stark experience of power is a healthy and honest figure, most certainly preferable

²⁰ Dante, *Inferno*, 34.88–93.

²¹ Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 290, citing Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2.2.80.1.2.

²² Machiavelli, “Discorso o dialogo intorno alla nostra lingua,” trans. William J. Landon, in *Politics, Patriotism, and Language: Niccolò Machiavelli’s Secular Patria and the Creation of an Italian National Identity* (Peter Lang, 2005), 129–30.

as a man to the contractualists who try to cover the reality of power underneath an established order by the moral, or should we say immoral, swindle of consent”.²³ In other words, for Machiavelli, theorising about power is personal, in response to the trauma of 1494, which Ludovico Sforza helped bring about by inviting in the French. Sforza committed the sin of Antenor, so named for the man who ignored Cassandra and enabled the Greeks to enter Troy. We now turn to see how Machiavelli accuses Dante of also ignoring Cassandra.

Machiavelli mentions Dante a couple of times in his famous letter to Vettori, where he describes coming home at the end of the day and putting on “courtly garments” to enter the “ancient courts of ancient men”.²⁴ However, it is clear he takes the wisdom of the “ancient men” as his authority. He explains, “Dante says that to have understood without retaining does not make knowledge”. Before that, he mentions how he had spent the day reading Dante and other poets, “of their amorous passions and their loves”, which he compares with his own, before observing the world go by at the local inn with the locals: “Thus involved with these vermin I scrape the mold off my brain and satisfy the malignity of this fate of mine”. It is unclear whether “these vermin” refers only to the locals he associates with at the inn or also to Dante, Petrarch, and the other “local” poets. Even so, neither reference in the letter to Dante speaks highly of him.

The other place where Machiavelli has recourse to his fellow Florentine is his neglected “Discourse About Our Language” (*Discorso intorno alla nostra lingua*), where he accuses Dante of treachery to his city, the sin of Antenor: “an excellent man, except where he discussed his native country, which he persecuted beyond all humanity and philosophical foundation”.²⁵ There, he summons the soul of Dante for a debate over whether there exists a common Italian language, which Dante seems to claim (based on Machiavelli’s reading of *De vulgari eloquentia*). Dante purports to have denied writing the *Divine Comedy* in the Florentine dialect and instead wrote it in a “courtly language” common to Italy. The question points to whether Italy can be unified as a coherent political unit or whether divisions among princes and differing languages and dialects will forever leave Italy divided, Latin having long been lost

²³ Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, 37.

²⁴ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 109.

²⁵ Machiavelli, “Discorso o dialogo intorno alla nostra lingua,” 132.

as the single (imposed) language of the Romans. Alexander Lee, in his biography of Machiavelli, claims, “[T]hat Dante had persisted in denying his tongue was, for Niccolò, tantamount to denying Florence itself. It was, in fact, treasonous—and it was pathetic, to boot. Still seething with fury at his own exile, Dante had allowed himself to become vengeful and cruel—exactly like the factional rivals he claimed to despise [...]. It would have been far better, far more patriotic and far more dignified had he simply admitted to writing in his native tongue”.²⁶

Dante committed the sin of Antenor in his justification of his use of language; this specific case points to Machiavelli's broader charge of the moralism he disparages among those who create imaginary republics whose effectual truth leads to ruin. Their imagined virtues not only lead to ruined principates but point to a spiritual disorder that even Dante could appreciate. It is for this reason that Voegelin regarded Machiavelli not as having transformed virtue into vice but as a spiritual realist who recognised that politics is a field of irreconcilable forces, including evil that must be confronted. Voegelin considered it a grave misunderstanding of Machiavelli's “theory of politics” to suggest that he claims “that foul means are frequently more helpful in acquiring power than fair ones”.²⁷ Machiavelli regarded acts of evil as the exception, not the rule. He counselled breaking faith as a way of keeping faith. Keeping the distinction is important to avoid having breaking faith be the norm instead of the exception and making appearing to keep faith the new reality. Confusing the two to make breaking faith the norm and dispensing with any limit to producing false appearances is the work of the epigones of Machiavelli, the ideologues who spin their secondary realities, as well as those less ideological but supposedly practical politicians who admire what they take to be Machiavelli's hard teaching and strive to mimic it. The situation Voegelin faced, and that we do as well, is the one created by those epigones. “Recapturing reality”, as Voegelin termed it, obliges us not only to resist those epigones but also Machiavelli. To do so obliges us to consider what might be regarded as Socrates's rejoinder to Machiavelli.

Voegelin's Socratic Rejoinder to Machiavelli

In his chapter on Machiavelli, Voegelin contrasts Machiavelli's realism with Plato's idealism, but he refers to both as spiritual realists, which suggests his contrast is somewhat superficial. But then how should we understand Plato as a spiritual realist? A closer look at Plato's account of the experiential basis of his philosopher-kings and queens provides a clue. The twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have shown the effectual truth of what happens when Machiavelli's epigones regard wicked deeds, veiled by illusory secondary realities, as the norm. The litany of dissidents and martyrs to totalitarian rule—Solzhenitsyn, Vaclav Havel, Jan Patočka, the Scholls, Liu Xiaobo, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Franz Jägerstätter, and Hungary's Josef Mindszenty—testify how the Socratic dictum that “it is better to suffer injustice than to commit it” must be the founding principle of a just and decent political order.²⁸ Martin Palouš has written about the importance of friendships among the Charter 77 members; their relationships enabled them not only to be together but to think together once more.²⁹ Palouš's insight testifies to Voegelin's insight, made in *The New Science of Politics*, that “there should be mentioned, as close to the Platonic range, the Aristotelian *philia*, the experiential nucleus of true community between mature men”.³⁰ Voegelin's insight echoes Plato's *Seventh Letter*, in which he claims, “For I saw it was impossible to do anything without friends and loyal followers; and to find such men ready to hand would be a piece of sheer good luck, once our city was no longer guided by the customs and practices of our fathers, while to train up new ones was anything but easy”.³¹ When civilisational order has utterly collapsed, when Machiavelli's epigones, in the belief that their *virtù* will obtain new modes and orders, but have instead destroyed the community's “customs and practices

²⁸ On Liu Xiaobo, see my “Self-Giving and the Constitution of Political Order: The Case of Liu Xiaobo,” in *Perspectives on Political Science* 52, no. 2 (2023), 51–59. doi.org/10.1080/10457097.2023.2183021. Socrates claims committing injustice is the greatest evil in Plato, “Gorgias,” in *Plato's Gorgias and Aristotle's Rhetoric*, trans. Joe Sachs (Focus Publishing, 2009), 469b.

²⁹ Martin Palouš, “Charter 77—A Retrospective dedicated to the memory of Liu Xiaobo,” in *Once Upon a Time of Transition: Fourteen Exercises in Political Thought* (Academica Press, 2021), 277–308.

³⁰ Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, 140.

³¹ Plato, “Epistle VII,” in *Plato's Epistles*, trans., Glen R. Morrow (Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1962), 325d.

²⁶ Alexander Lee, *Machiavelli: His Life and Times* (Picador, 2021), 513–14.

²⁷ Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, 56.

of our fathers”, the only recourse is the reconstitution of souls in communities of friendship, which is Voegelin’s central concern in his treatment of Plato.³² Even Machiavelli, to some extent, followed Plato’s model as a member of the Orto Oricellari circle; the dedicatees for the *Discourses* and the *Life of Castruccio Castracani* were members of this group.³³ The reconstitution of political community through the nucleus of friendship in the good is Socrates’ response to Glaucon’s demand he praise justice for its own sake and for its consequences.

Glaucon presents the image of extreme injustice as the tyrant with a glowing reputation for justice, which bears a striking similarity to Machiavelli’s counsel:

He rules in his city as one who seems to be just; next, he takes a wife from wherever he wants, and gives a daughter to whomever he wants; and besides benefitting from all these things, he gains by not being squeamish about doing injustice. So when he goes into competition both in private and in public, he overcomes his enemies and comes out with more, and since he has more he is rich and does good to his friends and damages his enemies. And to the gods he makes sacrifices in an adequate way [...] so that in all likelihood it’s more suitable for him, rather than the just person, to be dearer to the gods.³⁴

The tyrant seems just because he has parleyed his unjust acquisitions into the power of benefiting others, including the gods. His Machiavellian humanity enables him to keep up the appearance of being a just man, with the additional benefit that those benefits bind the recipients to him. Having a greater fear of suffering evil than committing it (contrary to Socrates’ argument), his beneficiaries learn to love him and hate those who might hate him.

In his discussion of Machiavelli, Voegelin seems to equate the Socratic dictum that it is better to suffer injustice than to commit it with Christ’s admonishment

to turn the other cheek, but this is incorrect. When Socrates tells Polemarchus it is never just to harm someone, he means by harm primarily, if not exclusively, moral harm by making someone “worse with regard to human virtue”.³⁵ One can point to numerous examples in Plato’s dialogue where physical harm or retribution is regarded as just punishment meant for moral improvement. Moreover, the just city may justly divide and conquer its enemies because that is simply a matter of hastening their already self-imposed decomposition.³⁶ The tough-mindedness of Socratic justice enables it to avoid betraying like Ptolomea.

The Cave and the Turn to the Other

The turning around to the good (*agathon*) represents the soul who turns to prefer suffering justice to committing it. The soul is released from its enslavement to illusions and mimetic desires, and in its freedom discovers self-agency as well as a capacity for community in friendship. Plato’s cave allegory cannot be understood simply as a turn from ignorance to knowledge, or the material realm to the intelligible realm. It also represents the turn to the friend.³⁷ As Dante narrates the turn away from God and neighbour in *Inferno*, Plato’s cave allegory displays the turn towards the good and friend.

The cave not only signifies the world and society in which we live. It also signifies our own souls in their darkened condition, as in a state of sleeping, dreaming, or death. In the cave, the world is not fully present to us, nor are we fully present to ourselves. We are disinclined to turn inwards to seek self-knowledge. Indeed, Socrates must continually remind us to turn inward. We are constantly forgetting that his images, including that of the just city and the cave, are for the sake of understanding the internal condition of the human soul. The prisoners, like Socrates’s interlocutors and us, therefore, have not been taught to find themselves or other persons. They are alienated from and forgetful of themselves and others. The image suggests the darkness of our ignorance envelops even ourselves. The

³² Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle, Order and History*, Vol. III (Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 13.

³³ Lee, *Machiavelli: His Life and Times*, 363, 404–25, 441, 446–50, 463, 491–99, 533–34 and as documented in *Machiavelli and His Friends: Their Personal Correspondence*, eds. James B. Atkinson and David Sices (Northern Illinois University Press, 2004).

³⁴ Plato, *Republic*, trans. Joe Sachs (Focus Publishing, 2007), 362b–c.

³⁵ Plato, *Republic*, trans. Joe Sachs, 335c.

³⁶ Plato, *Republic*, trans. Joe Sachs, 423a.

³⁷ For details, see John von Heyking, “Liberal Education, Friendship, and the ‘Political Art in the True Sense,’” in *The Dignity of the Liberal Arts: Souls and Cities in Political Education*, ed. James Greenaway (Lexington Books, 2020), 57–86.

prisoners inhabit their souls as caves and need to be liberated because they lack their own means of liberation.

But the ignorance of the prisoners, which seems self-satisfied, may become unsettled by a dim awareness that something is missing—perhaps their isolation and alienation from others. Socrates seems to indicate that the awakening of prisoners comes not from some discovery of speculative wisdom but that they seem to sense something is missing from the experience they have of themselves and of one another as persons. Let us consider how this might be.

Habituated to viewing their world as radically contingent and mediated by artefacts, they also come to view themselves as artefacts: “[S]uch people would have seen [nothing] of themselves or one another” other “than as shadows cast by the fire onto the part of the cave right across from them”.³⁸ They view themselves and each other also as this blend of natural and artificial, as being the same substance of the shadows that they perceive as extensions of the cave wall. They would have been taught there is no substantial difference between the shadows they see on the wall and the voices projected from that wall, not to mention the persons they encounter in proximity to one another. “If they were able to converse with one another”, not only would they regard the shadows as true beings, but they would regard one another as substantially the same as the shadows, these compounds of artificial and natural. In other words, their condition is what Machiavelli claims of men generally:

Men in general judge more by their eyes than by their hands, because seeing is given to everyone, touching to few. Everyone sees how you appear, few touch what you are; and these few dare not oppose the opinion of many who have the majesty of the state to defend them; and in the actions of all men, and especially of princes, where there is no court to appeal to, one looks to the end [...] For the vulgar are taken in by the appearance and the outcome of a thing.³⁹

Yet the hands of the prisoners in Plato’s cave are not bound. Prisoners cannot see one another, but it is quite possible that in that cramped cave, they can touch each

³⁸ Plato, *Republic*, trans. Joe Sachs, 515a.

³⁹ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, VIII.71.

other with their hands. Through their sense of touch, they may detect something essentially different from what they see, suggesting to them a sense of otherness from themselves. Elsewhere, Socrates points out to young Theaetetus that the perception we conduct through touching takes place in the soul.⁴⁰ In addition, the blind use their hands to know their surroundings.⁴¹ Touch is not just one of the senses, but as the sense that determines the person (who by losing touch would die), touch is the sense that perceives being.⁴² Holding one’s hand, especially in darkness, is the act of a teacher, a *psychagogue*, who brings a student from dangerous darkness to light.⁴³ For Socrates, the many seem better able to judge through “touch” than Machiavelli thinks, which has the potential to subvert Machiavellian politics.

The hand of the stranger they touch would seem very different from the shadowy hand that society says represents (and is identical to) what they are touching. Socrates seems to suggest a disjunction between the vision of the world they are presented with on the cave wall and their silent encounter with the person beside them. The prisoners may be unable to reconcile those two encounters, which places them in a state of perplexity and even alienation. But it is a state they have no way yet of describing or naming: How can they name that of which they are ignorant?

Education entails leading the student so she is able to participate in the common Logos of humanity. The image of the sun within the cave allegory signifies:

[T]he look of the good, but once it’s been seen, it has to be concluded that it’s the very cause, for all things, of all things right and beautiful, that it generates light and its source in the visible realm, and is itself the source that bestows truth and insight in the intelligible realm. Anyone who’s going to act intelligently in private or in public needs to have sight of it.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Plato, *Theaetetus*, 185c–186e; Aristotle, *On the Soul*, II.11.

⁴¹ Homer, *Odyssey*, VIII.195–99.

⁴² Aristotle, *On the Soul*, III.13.

⁴³ Virgil frequently touches Dante to guide him through the darkness in *Inferno*, 2005, IX.51, 58, 73, XVII.93–96, XXXIV.70, 82.

⁴⁴ Plato, *Republic*, trans. Joe Sachs, 517c.

The good is “the cause of all things”, “what is”, and “justice itself”.⁴⁵ It is not a piece of information but an infusion of being (or “beyond being”) that reorients the soul. The soul is transformed by turning towards it because in turning from darkness to light, from ignorance to wisdom, we experience the plenitude of our being, our selfhood. It presents a “way of life” superior to the competition for political offices and other pursuits in the cave.

Because liberated prisoners learn to cherish what is best in themselves, they also cherish what is best in one another and seek to preserve it. When Socrates claims that before entering politics, one must first learn that justice is better than injustice and that suffering injustice is preferable to committing it, he seems to have in mind the horror a well-ordered soul feels at the prospect of betraying one’s friend, one to whom he “cannot help being attached”. One not only betrays one’s friend but also betrays oneself. The friend as “another self”, who is also “inside” us, stands before us as a reminder of our self-destruction when we commit injustice. The person we face reminds us that we also face ourselves, our other self. Having tasted friendship in the good, it is monstrous to deny it then to oneself in betraying a friend. Why would one wish to revert to a state of dissipation, whose very meaning means one’s self dissolves? Why choose to return to the cave, not as a conscious and thinking soul who has seen the light but to revert to the state of a dissipated prisoner’s non-thinking and non-being? Why choose one’s own self-destruction? Socrates might very well have understood why Judas hanged himself after betraying Jesus. Injustice is its own punishment. The prospect of betrayal as self-destruction is what led Dante to produce his stark images in *Inferno*’s darkest depths.

The liberated prisoner is compelled to return to the cave in part because she “cannot help being attached” to those with the potential to be her friends. Not only does she understand why justice is better than injustice, and suffering injustice is preferable to committing it, her soul is habituated to the practice of justice and of friendship. The ascent out of the cave is an image of the Socratic teaching that before one enters politics, one must learn that justice is superior to injustice and suffering injustice is preferable to committing it.⁴⁶ That is the “political art in the true sense” in which Socrates claims that only he is practically engaged.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Plato, *Republic*, trans. Joe Sachs, 515d, 516c–d, 517b–e, 521c.

⁴⁶ Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Joe Sachs, 527b–e.

⁴⁷ Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Joe Sachs, 521d.

Conclusion

I conclude by turning to the “Circular Letter” (1939) in which Voegelin and his wife Lissy, upon arrival in the United States, bid adieu to her former life, her family, acquaintances, and former city, Vienna: “Today, therefore, we literally know scarcely a single person in Vienna. If we were to return, we would be returning to a foreign city of which we know nothing except for the houses and streets”.⁴⁸

The letter seethes with indignation at suffering betrayal from intimates caused by the complete moral collapse of Austrian society, a situation comparable to Plato’s Athens and Machiavelli’s Italy. The pathologies of the unjust pusillanimously supporting Nazism, of ignoring their atrocities, of drones like her idiotic brother-in-law who could only find success on account of the destruction of others (e.g., receiving a car stolen from a Jew), and blame apportioned to Eric and Lissy “for having been so caught up in the events” correspond to the many images Plato describes in the cave. The ideological destruction of Europe was so awful because it was so personal. Like those whose souls who betray party and nation and drop into the realm of Ptolomea in Dante’s *Inferno*, Austria was full of the dead living.

But Lissy is happy to report she and Eric have found a new life in the United States: “[T]he tears of joy begin”.⁴⁹ Eric has found more secure work and the two of them have obtained their “first papers as American citizens and are happy each day anew to have escaped the bedlam of Europe”. They have escaped the cave and have relocated to the regime predicated upon an anti-Machiavellian basis, as Leo Strauss characterised the American regime.

One need not consider Voegelin’s discovery of America, which enabled him to discern the parochialism of Europe, and his analysis of American *homonoia* rooted in liberty.⁵⁰ It is enough to note Voegelin’s efforts to “recapture reality” from Machiavelli’s epigones were personal. Recapturing reality entailed recovering personhood in one’s self and with others, oriented to the good.

⁴⁸ “Lissy’s Circular Letter,” in *Voegelin Recollected: Conversations on a Life*, eds. Barry Cooper and Jodi Bruhn (University of Missouri Press, 2008), 251.

⁴⁹ *Voegelin Recollected*, 253.

⁵⁰ John von Heyking and Barry Cooper, “A Cow is Just a Cow’: George Grant and Eric Voegelin on the United States,” *VoegelinView*, 26 February 2009, <https://voegelinview.com/george-grant-and-eric-voegelin-on-the-united-states-part-1/>

The Political Philosophy of Eric Voegelin as a Philosophy of Belonging

JAMES GREENAWAY

Eric Voegelin did not address belonging as an explicit theme in his work, but this essay will argue that, in resisting existential and political disorder, his political philosophy sets out the fundamental conditions that allow for a philosophy of belonging. In doing so, Voegelin's thought endures as a powerful rejoinder to both the mood and consequences of alienation.

Alienation and a Preliminary Philosophy of Belonging

By and large, philosophers have not been particularly interested in developing an explicit philosophy of belonging. Philosophy, particularly since Hegel, has been concerned with coming to terms with *Entfremdung* (alienation), which one might characterise as the opposite of belonging. At a certain level of analysis, we seem to be more interested in alienation than belonging, yet one might argue that an interest in alienation might indicate an indirect interest in belonging. After all, if we experience ourselves as alienated, then we must be alienated from something to which *we would* belong in some prior sense. We will return to this below, but, for now, let us recognise that the problems of alienation or estrangement have

presented deeply significant political problems for Western societies for the last two hundred years and also for individual persons from time immemorial. That is, alienation has been given political expression by ideological movements, arguably from the late eighteenth century; but as a dislocation in the individual soul, one could name it as a possibility for any person in any era. Let us attempt a preliminary heuristic description of the problem: Alienation points to the belonging that is not. Alienation suggests a gap, a vacuum, or an emptiness where there might have been a fullness, a fullness that we desired. Phenomenologically, we cannot experience ourselves as alienated unless there is already that from which we are alienated. What is *that*? The answer to such a question would be the subject matter of a philosophy of belonging. The first question of a philosophy of belonging would be: What does it mean to belong? A philosophy of belonging must render our many different kinds of belonging intelligible and verifiable precisely as belonging. Only a proper philosophy of belonging can diagnose and provide a remedy for the failures and repudiations of belonging that we know all too well under the name of alienation. This diagnosis and remedy are what Eric Voegelin has greatly contributed to.

Let us consider three themes from his overall contribution. From the beginning of his *Order and History* series in the 1950s, Voegelin emphasised that to exist is to participate in the totality of being we can name as the cosmos.¹ Then, from *Anamnesis* in the mid-1960s onwards, Voegelin centred his efforts on developing a theory of consciousness, and this was rooted in his discovery of Plato's *metaxy* (in-between) as the participatory tension of consciousness. Participation, cosmos, tension: these three themes recur throughout much of Voegelin's career, and they happen to be crucial notions for any philosophy of belonging.

The Tension of Consciousness as the Tension of Belonging

Of the three themes, we begin with the tension of consciousness. In one of his late essays, "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme", Voegelin writes, "Truth is a perspective of reality, arising from man's participation, with his conscious existence, in the reality of which he is a part".² Reality is not an object that confronts us somehow, an object "out there" to which one might advert on occasion or perhaps might just as well ignore. Reality is what we exist within and exist as part of. It is the comprehensive and comprehending "It" that both holds us and that we participate in for our very existence.³ The *truth* of reality, then, is also not "out there" as "an ultimate piece of information given to an outside observer, but reality itself becoming luminous in the events of experience and imaginative symbolization".⁴ If we would know something of the truth of reality, we must begin in the most primordial sense with our own consciousness. That is, for Voegelin, we begin with our own experiences of existence and the accompanying imaginative efforts to symbolise such experiences. If we begin from the content of consciousness, we can proceed to a meditation on the structure of consciousness. Such is Voegelin's method, and his meditations on the tension of consciousness, this essay suggests, provide us with the grounds for considering him a philosopher of belonging. In the *Symposium*, Plato describes Eros (love) as an "in between" spirit. The Platonic insight is that to love is to exist in a tension (*metaxy*), ultimately caught between the poles of mortality and immortality, time and eternity, ignorance and wisdom. For Voegelin, consciousness itself is this erotic tension, which is also the central tension of human existence: To be human is to exist in the *metaxy*.

In general, a consequence of Voegelin's own originality and authenticity as a thinker is that he is difficult to categorise. While normally recognised as a political

¹ "God and man, world and society form a primordial community of being. The community with its quaternarian structure is, and is not, a datum of human experience. It is a datum of experience insofar as it is known to man by virtue of his participation in the mystery of its being. It is not a datum of experience insofar as it is not given in the manner of an object of the external world but is knowable only from the perspective of participation in it." Eric Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 14: *Order and History*, Vol. 1: *Israel and Revelation*, ed. Maurice P. Hogan (University of Missouri Press, 2001), 39.

² Eric Voegelin, "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme: A Meditation," in *Collected Works*, Vol. 12, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 326.

³ Voegelin's term is "It-reality," to be distinguished from "thing-reality." Of the It-reality, he writes, "To denote the reality that comprehends the partner in being, i.e., God and the world, man and society, no technical term has been developed, as far as I know, by anybody." Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 18, ed. Ellis Sandoz (University of Missouri Press, 2000), 30.

⁴ Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 12, 326.

thinker, Voegelin's efforts are largely directed towards the further differentiation of key philosophical insights. With regard to the tension of consciousness, he proceeds to explore and clarify the structures of such tension. On the one hand, consciousness operates as the intentionality familiar to us all in the directedness and desire to know and to value. On the other hand, consciousness is discoverable as a luminous "site and sensorium" of transcendent-divine presence. This metaxic tension between the immanence of things available to human intentionality and the transcendent mystery out of which those things emerge—and in which consciousness itself is a participant—is the "cognitive center at which reality becomes luminous for its truth".⁵ The *metaxy* is existentially constitutive of the human person because every person participates for their existence in the tension between poles. Yet Voegelin identifies not just two structures of consciousness but three: intentionality, luminosity, and the reflective distance that maintains a balance between the two. Voegelin recognises the temptation of collapsing the tension between intentionality and luminosity, effectively resulting in an existentially pathological condition that he calls "reflective identity".⁶ Of these structures, he descriptively writes:

[T]he human intentionality of the quest [for the truth of reality] is surrounded by the divine mystery of the reality in which it occurs. The mystery is the horizon that draws us to advance toward it but withdraws as we advance; it can give direction to the quest of truth but it cannot be reached; [...] Of intentionality and mystery, we shall speak as "structures" of consciousness with the caution, however, that they are not fixtures of a human consciousness in the immanentist sense [...] but moving forces in the process of reality becoming luminous [...]

⁵ Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 12, 350.

⁶ While we do not discuss this further here, Voegelin himself notes: "I have, therefore chosen the phrase reflective distance as a technical term to denote Plato's awareness of the problem. It is meant to bring to conceptual clarity the difference between reality becoming reflectively luminous in consciousness and the collapse of reflective luminosity into self-reflective identity. The reflective distance between the movements of the divine-human encounter and their articulation through symbols will bring itself forcefully to the thinker's attention when a differentiation of truth on the level of the participatory experience cannot be adequately articulated by the symbols available in the social and historical environment. New symbols will have to be found, and older symbols will have to change their meaning." Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 12, 345.

[T]he process of reality becoming luminous is further structured by the consciousness of the two moving forces [intentionality and luminosity], of the tension between them, and of the responsibility to keep their movement in such balance that the image resulting from their interaction will not distort the truth of reality.⁷

For Voegelin, consciousness is a multilevel participation in reality. For our purposes, it is also fitting to characterise this complexity of consciousness and its tension as belonging, emphasising the dramatic concreteness of existence. After all, there are persons and peoples, meanings and truths, places and times, as well as various arrangements and objects—not to mention the divine mystery of being that holds all of these in existence—that give our lives this concreteness. In order to appreciate that the tension of consciousness intrinsically involves belonging, we must be attentive to at least two dynamic orientations in our metaxic relatedness to reality. Let us call the first of the two (phenomenological) orientations "existence-from".

A. *Existence-from*: Nobody exists in a vacuum. That is, existence is always experienced concretely, where every person always exists in relation to the concreteness of the reality he or she is in and the reality of what they are participating in. One finds, for example, that someone or something is already a constitutive part of one's own personhood. Living or dead, present or absent, another person, community, time, place, object, or totality has already formed part of who we take ourselves to be. We exist-from them. They are the ones by whom, or those by which, we have come to know ourselves. So, if I ask who I am, I know myself as spouse, parent, child, friend; I am a colleague, a neighbour, a citizen; I am a fellow human being who shares in the universal predicament of human flourishing and suffering; I am a participant in the bond and order of the cosmos, a cosmos grounded in the ever-fecund, ever-present divine mystery. To belong is to exist-from the totality of reality that holds us and from those persons and places and times whose concreteness has made us who we are. It is an orientation of cognition and recognition. Both the immanence of knowledge and materiality and the transcendence of mystery bear concretely upon who I am and therefore upon how

⁷ Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 12, 326–27.

I exist. All of this constitutes my existence—experienced, understood, and named here as “existence-from”. Phenomenologically, to exist is never simply “to be”—decontextualised and unrelated—but to exist-from an encompassing, multivalent cosmos and its constituent partners in every moment.

B. Existence-towards: Yet existing-from someone or something else is *not sufficient* for belonging. There is always the possibility of becoming indifferent to what I exist-from, of falling out of love, of prideful ambition, of failing in one’s marriage, letting down one’s children and parents, of dishonouring or becoming estranged from friends, etc. There is much that would bar the way to finding oneself “at home” and much that would negatively impact belonging. To belong, then, is also dependent upon a second orientation: existence-toward. Existence-toward is fundamentally an attitude of careful attentiveness, of questing intelligence and affirming reasonableness, of loving responsibility; of existential commitment to be the person one needs to be; of desire to share in the life and reality of another. Where existence-from is an orientation of cognition and recognition, existence-toward is an orientation of affection. When we are faithful to a relationship or exult in being in a place and time; when we honour an obligation; seek the truth; or pledge a covenant; when we genuflect before all that is sacred, we feel desire, awe, and a bond of care or duty towards someone or something. This affection is also who I am, and also how I exist. To exist as a person, then, also means concretely to exist-toward someone or something.

Just like existence-from, existence-toward is not sufficient *by itself* for belonging. For example, when we yearn for what will not receive us or we reach towards the other and are spurned, we undergo the bitter experience of heartbreak or exclusion. In desire, we may exist-toward the other, but if they do not or will not welcome us or recognise us, then we do not exist-from them. We do not belong. Existence-from and existence-toward are the two conditional orientations of belonging, without which we find ourselves in a state of *not-belonging*. If we find ourselves straining *towards* what we exist-from, then we do belong. This is a simple hermeneutic that admits of countless concrete variations and complements Voegelin’s three structures of consciousness because it transposes the same tension of consciousness into the existential tension of belonging. Let us offer the following definition of belonging: To belong is to love what already grounds or constitutes one’s own self.

Participation as Belonging in the Cosmos

Let us turn now to the other two themes: participation and cosmos. Our relationship to reality and our situatedness within the totality of reality run more deeply than we are ordinarily aware of. In the first volume of *Order and History*, Voegelin sets out the primordial context of existence that is suggestive of a context of belonging. God and world, man and society are the four fields of reality whose communion comprises the totality available to human experience, a communion we exist-from and can exist-toward. God and man, world and society compose what Voegelin calls “the fourfold community of being”—the “quaternarian structure” of the cosmos as the Whole of reality. By simply existing, we are already participating in the cosmic totality. We exist in the cosmos, but we can still ask the further question, do we belong in the cosmos? That is, we may exist-from the four-fold community of being, but what is our attitude *towards* it? Do we exist-toward what we exist-from? Have we “forgotten” the cosmos, or do we repudiate reality in some nihilistic sense? If it is affection that we bear towards the totality that already holds us, that we exist-from, then we find our belonging in the cosmos. Our belonging in the cosmos is surely the most primordial characterisation of ordered, flourishing human existence, one that pervades the meaning of our personal lives, the meaning of our cities and nations, the meaningful direction of humanity in history.⁸ Belonging in the cosmos symbolises more than abstract existence and more than the partnership of participating partners. It means that we find ourselves at home in the quaternarian communion of God and man, world and society. The cosmos is a communion which constitutes the highest heuristic context for human existence, individually, politically, and historically.

⁸ Humanität is Johann Gottfried von Herder’s equivalent term for the communion that he discusses as the nation. Humanität means humanity as both the abstract universal idea and the concretely realised belonging of persons in communion here and now. The nation, for Herder, anchors Humanität in concrete living. That is, it is in the nation that its people learn how to belong in between their own particularity as a people and the universality of shared humanity in the abiding presence and primordial immediacy of the cosmos. See Herder, *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, introduction by Frank E. Manuel (University of Chicago Press, 1968). Frederick Barnard comments that Herder stressed the connectedness of nation and Humanität “as a performative principle, which enters into and enriches human aspirations within their particular milieu and sphere of endeavour.” See F. M. Barnard, *Herder on Nationality, Humanity, and History* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2003), 77.

Let us clarify these abiding cosmological relationships. Clearly, we exist *in relation* to other persons, communities, and societies. It is also clear that we exist *in relation* to the world in the sense of the entire, emergent natural universe. Furthermore, we exist *in relation* to our own selves. And we ultimately exist *in relation* to the permanently present *mysterium fascinans et tremendum* to which all existence owes its being and which we routinely refer to as God.⁹ The cosmos is the totality of these four fields of reality; and each person participates in that cosmos by way of these four sets of primordial relations. On the one hand, the cosmos is the oneness of the four-fold order of reality. Yet, on the other, the person is also a oneness: a human “hub” or centre whose existential task is to order the fold-fold for him or herself by way of his or her intrinsic relationality. For Voegelin, “the primary experience of the cosmos” is the ineradicability in the tension of consciousness. Between all that lasts and all that passes; between one’s own mortal limits and the immortality of truth, goodness, and beauty that orientates the soul; between the transcendent-divine God as the ground of the cosmos and the immanent material world, man exists as a relationality, a tension or a *metaxy*.¹⁰ The person must live the *metaxy* or existential tension by the vicissitudes and decisions of his or her life. But without such a primordial backdrop of relationality in and of the fourfold cosmos, without the primary (or primordial) experience of cosmos as the underlying order and matrix of reality we exist-from, there could arise neither consciousness of the permanence and immediacy of the divine ground nor differentiations of consciousness nor historical consciousness; nor could the fulfilment of the *bios theoretikos* be realised, nor the hope for the beatific vision. In short, without the abiding primordial awareness of existence as participation and belonging in a cosmos, we would fail to rise to the stature of our own personal humanity that is surely achieved in the loving affirmation of that cosmos. To exist in communion with God and man, world and society, is to exist-from and exist-toward the cosmos in belonging.

Voegelin’s theory of consciousness works as a generalised account of the tension of existence, and behind all such theoretical discussions, there is the living, concrete reality of the individual person. Indeed, it is the person who compels us to do more than to think merely in terms of consciousness, and instead to think in terms of the embodied and conscious, located and encultured person him or herself. Every person exists in relation to the entire cosmos, whether they are aware of it or not, but it is the gladness and recognition of one’s existence as nested within a four-fold cosmos that constitutes existence-as-belonging in the cosmos. The existential quest in consciousness towards the luminosity of mystery, so brilliantly traced by Voegelin, must still be personalised by each person as the quest for one’s own belonging in the cosmos. If the cosmos were not already present in some sense within each person (existence-from), there would be no possibility of seeking the mystery of that cosmos (existence-toward). Yet to exist-toward the fourfold cosmos that we already exist-from—as *imago Dei*; as a self; as an organic body in a material universe; as spouse, as parent, as friend, etc.—is to begin to belong simultaneously to the four-fold structure of the cosmos. To belong is to have found a home in the cosmos. In this sense, every home functions as a microcosmos. A home, whatever that may be for any person in this life, radiates a bond and order by which to live and for which, potentially, to die. A home—whether a marriage, a family, a city, a nation—is what we are prepared to sacrifice our lives for because a home functions as a microcosmic mirror not only of the totality of reality but also of the absolute value or sacredness that permeates that totality from its divine ground. A home, one might say, is porous for the always four-fold cosmos that moves within it. To belong in matrimonial communion with one’s spouse, for example, or in community with one’s own people, is a microcosmic existence that simultaneously is a relation with the other person, a self-relation, a relation with the bodily predicament that is shared, and a relation of gratitude towards the divine ground for the blessing that has bestowed a sanctuary, an enclosure and a threshold, over which to meet and retreat from the world.¹¹

⁹ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford University Press, 1952).

¹⁰ See Tilo Schabert’s *The Second Birth: On the Political Beginnings of Human Existence*, transl. Javier Ibáñez-Noé (University of Chicago Press, 2015). Here, Schabert sets out the human predicament of bodiliness and mortality, a limitation which is offset only by politics. It is our entering into political existence from a merely natural existence that allows us to practise a “mimesis of the god.” The necessary and noble craft of politics is how human beings provide for ourselves, in spite of our obvious shortcomings, and attune our shared mortality to the immortal cosmos that draws us forth from a merely natural order.

¹¹ See the discussion of the contrast between Heidegger’s “enclosure” and Levinas’s “threshold” in C. L. Eubanks and D. J. Gauthier, “The Politics of the Homeless Spirit: Heidegger and Levinas on Dwelling and Hospitality,” in *History of Political Thought* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2011), 125–46.

Repudiation of Belonging

It turns out that existence and belonging can be functionally convertible terms when 1. We exist-toward what we exist-from; 2. We think in terms of the person when the interiority of personal order becomes our unit of analysis, rather than thinking solely on the social level; and 3. We frame our thinking narratively or in terms of the concrete drama of living and dying, rather than limiting our thinking to the abstract level of theory only. Given this potentiality for isomorphism between existence and belonging, what then is the meaning of alienation? What could it mean to deny the possibility that existence and belonging cohere?

Voegelin provides an answer in his “Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme” essay where he considers the centrality of suffering in human life. He mentions some of the agonies that spring from Pandora’s box in Hesiod’s *Works and Days*—hunger, hard work, disease, early death, and the fear of suffering injustice at the hands of the stronger man—and he adds that “these miseries are not experienced as senseless. We understand them as the lot of man [...]”¹² The dreamer may be anyone who fantasises about existence unburdened by such miseries, but it is the *activist* dreamer who passes judgement on the senseless absurdity of suffering when the miseries in question are thought to be capable of being eliminated from existence altogether. That is, if the activist dreamer imagines him or herself to possess the knowledge or the power to transfigure reality from imperfection to *perfection*, then there is an urgent obligation imposed upon him or her to implement the plan and to bring forth the “Utopia”. The *utopia* is the no-place that now must become some place in the world. How will utopia meet our needs to live without suffering? Here the various ideologies come forward to answer the question: as the paradise of racial, ethnic, or cultural purity; as the progressively ever better future; as the solution to the riddle of history and its oppressor classes; and so on.¹³ Voegelin observes that the “break, not with reality but with its sense”, forces the activist to set forth a necessary, ideological dream-story that presents to the world the project of transfiguring the world into *perfection* as plausible and achievable. The reality that includes dealing

with the inevitability of the various sources of misery in Pandora’s box is countered with an alternative, dream-induced reality, the “Second Reality”, the Utopia of a *final perfection*. The activist dreamer knows how to perfect reality and sets his shoulder to the plough.

This seemingly ubiquitous term, “perfection”, needs some attention. Indeed, some notion of perfection and its achievement seems to be a primary motivation in both alienation and belonging. In the case of Karl Marx’s analysis of alienation in the *Philosophic and Economic Manuscripts of 1844*, concerned as he was with the grim reality of work conditions and the alienation of workers from the fruit of their labour, from nature, from other people, and from themselves, liberation needed to move in a direction away from the present imperfection towards a perfection that was dreamed possible and which evidently beckoned through revolution. Everything that workers found themselves in relation to represented, not what they belonged to but what they were alienated from. Belonging was precisely what was absent, and so it was alienation that needed to be overcome for the worker to be restored to himself, others, nature, and his work. The problem with Marx was that he seems not to have been interested in restoring a lost belonging—ultimately a recovery of the cosmos—but in pursuing the dream of terrestrial perfection.

In the case of belonging, however, the person can be said to exist as Relation (capitalised); and the completion or consummation of relation is belonging. Belonging is a completion or consummation because every communion between spouses, among friends, families, cities, nations, and in the grace of the human-divine relation bears within itself a *trace* of perfection that gives it direction and purpose. In seeking its own perfection, by way of enacting its own consummation over and over, every communion affirms its existence as alive and meaningful.¹⁴ Neither perfected nor left unperfected, every communion (that is, every belonging) is straining or reaching in the direction of perfection. Again, every

¹² Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 12, 318.

¹³ On the morphology of ideology as a substitute religion, see Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (University of Chicago Press, 1987), 120–21.

¹⁴ On the consummation of the political communion that forms cities and nations, see my chapter, “Political Goods, Political *Communitas*,” in James Greenaway, *A Philosophy of Belonging: Persons, Politics, Cosmos* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2023), 189–231. On the cosmos as communion, Plato writes, “The sages too say, Callicles, that the heavens and the earth, gods and men, are bound together by communion, friendship, order, temperance, and justice, and for this reason, my friend, they call this universe order, and not disorder or intemperance.” Plato, *Gorgias* 508a, in *The Works of Plato*, trans. Henry Cary (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1848), 46.

communion seeks its own perfection by way of its consummation; and without consummation, each communion faces the risk of disintegration. Perfection is the lodestar of belonging.

The complication inherent in the desire for perfection is that the dream of a perfect world, which drives the ideological activist, is also what drives our belonging. The various types of belonging or communion are forged in the bond and order of love, and we come to grasp perfection as inherent in our belonging as direction and desire, as a trace of sacredness in our midst. For example, what precisely is the value of our children? Of our parents? Of our home? It is our belonging in family and friendships, in our tasks in the workplace and with colleagues, in peace within and among nations, in our intimacy with God, that continues to complete us and makes life meaningful.

But if belonging is not the goal, yet the desire for perfection remains, then perfection is pursued in a way that can jeopardise or negate belonging. If we belong to the cosmos, as the totality of reality grounded in God, then we accept the troubles that emerge from Pandora's box as part of our mortal predicament in that cosmos. Our belonging, with its sufferings and joys, sometimes calls for self-sacrificial love. However, the perspective of the activist dreamer is quite the opposite, characterised by revulsion at the cosmos with its miseries and imperfections. Belonging coheres in love, but alienation is driven by the engine of disgust and resentment. The utopia imagined by the activist dreamer is more properly characterised as a symbol not of belonging but of "unbelonging".

Unbelonging is the repudiation of belonging entirely, but to repudiate belonging is to repudiate what we would belong to. Where belonging reaches towards an affirmation of a mysterious cosmos that gathers, orders, and draws us, unbelonging is the nihilistic rejection of the cosmos. It is the active undoing of the work of belonging, which is the work of communion. The activist dream becomes the plan of active forgetfulness when, as Marx writes, it aims to tear down "all the old muck of the ages".¹⁵ The postmodern task of deconstruction culminates in a dismantling of our belonging in the cosmos for the sake of a new and perfected dream "construction" in the world under the immanentised conditions of space and time.

¹⁵ Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (Norton & Co., 1978), 193.

However, the reality of existence in the cosmos abides even as dream reality asserts itself and builds its destructive momentum. There is no God because there can be no authority higher than the ideological pronouncements from the party platform. The consequences are legion. Under the conditions of unbelonging, the sacramentality of nature is replaced by the mastery of nature for the sake of utility. Persons can be reimagined not as persons but as merely unitary individuals within a socio-political mechanism or as "individual members of social groups". Furthermore, attempts can be made to substitute the communion of belonging for ideologically approved forms of association, such as party membership, militant cells, mass organisations, revolutionary committees, and so forth.¹⁶ Persons and peoples can be imprisoned, exiled, and killed in vast numbers. But it turns out that there is no ideological overcoming of the person as Relation, not even in mass murder. There is no overcoming of the cosmos in which we exist and to which we can belong. All that ideology can do is eclipse the cosmos for a time. But in that time of eclipse, the activist imagination runs wild, dreaming of the elimination of suffering and sacrifice by the achievement of a perfected social order. Subtle and seductive, the ideological dream of perfection tempts us to forget our existence in the four-fold cosmos (including the possibility of our belonging to one another as fellow human beings) and to set about undoing these various levels of existence and belonging in the cosmos.

Voegelin's analysis demonstrates that, emergent from the pathologically reflective identity of dream and reality, it is the libidinous will to grasp and possess perfection, rather than live towards it, that distinguishes belonging and unbelonging. Rather than existing-from the trace of perfection in our various kinds of communion, and existing-toward the perfection that consummation mirrors, Voegelin has laid bare the ideological will to construct the perfection of the world and to construct the end of history, undoing the bond and order of the cosmos.

¹⁶ For example, in the Chinese Communist-Marxist utopia of Chairman Mao, approved forms of association include party membership and party cells; mass organisations of peasants, workers, and women's federations; revolutionary committees in schools, factories, and local government; People's Liberation Army at all levels in society; Red Guards for the youth; Study Groups and propaganda teams for cultural dissemination; collective farms and communes to integrate social and agricultural activities. The Fascist and National Socialist dream worlds included parallel associations. It is not hard to see that these ideologically pure forms of association provide instances of Michael Oakeshott's "enterprise associations," rather than his "civil associations", which are already a living communion of persons.

Conclusion

The person has relations in his or her life but can be more properly symbolised as “Relation” because he and she exist both from and towards the cosmos and its component, primordial partners—never abstractly but in all concreteness. That is, we recognise personhood as embodying the conditions for belonging—existence-from and existence-toward—since only persons can know, value, and love, and only their love establishes a communion of belonging. Moreover, communion bears the trace of perfection within it, giving desire and direction to life—a sense of absolute value that abides in all that is precious to us beyond all cost-benefit calculation—because every communion seeks its own consummation, neither finally perfected nor left unperfected, but always chasing the perfection that draws it forth. Belonging functions as a microcosmic Whole because each communion is itself a Whole that contains the four-fold relationality constituting the Whole of reality. Perfection is a primary motivation, but how we pursue it matters. Much is at stake, and we are always at risk of becoming “lost in the cosmos”, to make use of Walker Percy’s phrase. The pursuit of perfection in desire and love becomes a concern for belonging, whereas the pursuit of perfection in disgust and resentment becomes an ideological narrowing and a destructive unbelonging. More than anyone else, Voegelin’s work of resisting disorder, the entirety of his career that sought to recapture reality through a genuine love of wisdom, has laid the foundations for the exploration that we can name as a philosophy of belonging, which provides an antidote to the seduction of ideology and its inherent alienation.

Autobiographical Reflections on Autobiographical Reflections: Personal Recollections of Eric Voegelin “Engaged in the Effort of Regaining Reality”

TILO SCHABERT

At the end of this essay, I formulate “Voegelin’s five principles of scholarship”. They resume, to the benefit of the gentle reader, my attempt to follow the lead that Voegelin himself drew at the occasion of his *Autobiographical Reflections* when he

stated, “The most important means of regaining contact with reality is the recourse to thinkers of the past who had not yet lost contact with reality, or who were engaged in the effort of regaining it.”¹ I may presume that his advice still holds, given our present intellectual situation, with the rudiments of a climate of opinion, which continue to veil rather than enlighten reality. Couldn’t we do better than turning to this “thinker of the past” who had made the illumination of the reality within which humans exist the programme of his scholarly life—Eric Voegelin? Who struggled hard not to waver from the paths of reality revealed to him by his studies, always to remain, intellectually as well as emotionally, a partner of reality, to gain its guidance, to be, pardon me, if you should be surprised, its prophet?²

I had the chance to know Eric Voegelin and, at times, closely collaborate with him over a period of nineteen years. I could, and the realisation of it becomes more evident in retrospect, observe him being indeed “engaged”, to apply the words from his statement just quoted, “in the effort of regaining [reality]”. I propose, therefore, to use my own experience for portraying a “thinker of the past” to whom we might—we ought to, let me say—turn to for guidance when we search for the truth of our existence in all its modes. Hence, the play on the word “autobiographical” in entitling this essay, made plain at once by the expression “personal recollections” in the subtitle. I shall use, then, such recollections as a blueprint for my exposition. And I shall integrate into it, besides, information and data provided by Voegelin’s correspondence, some of his texts, and relevant secondary literature.

A. 1964–1985

My first experience of Eric Voegelin dates from 1964. During the *Sommersemester* (summer term) at the University of Munich, in May, June, and July, he gave his lectures on “Hitler and the Germans”.³ I attended the lecture course. In late July, when the course had ended, I wrote a letter to Voegelin. While browsing through scholarly journals in the Reading Room of the University’s library, I had come across an article just published by Joseph Ratzinger, then a young professor of theology at the University of Münster. Voegelin had presented in his lectures a very critical view on the conduct of the Catholic Church at the time of the Nazi regime and exposed the connivance of Church leaders and theologians with the regime. By contrast, a new, self-critical theology breathed from the text of Ratzinger. It would be a good idea, I thought, to bring the article to Voegelin’s attention. I sent him a letter then, briefly outlining the substance of the article and noting the bibliographical references. As I was about to leave for a longer stay in France, I noted at the top of the letter an address there (*poste restante* at an island off Brittany’s coast). I didn’t really expect a response from him: Why would the great professor thus honour a young student hitherto entirely unknown to him? Yet, in the middle of August, I found at *poste restante* in Belle-Île-en-Mer, to my surprise, a letter for me from Eric Voegelin. He kindly thanked me for my information on Ratzinger’s article and, to my great surprise, invited me to come to see him at his Institute early in the autumn term.

Eric Voegelin, as I later understood, quite liked to get to know young people, to converse with them, to hear what they felt and thought. In my case, another factor came into play. He associated me with his own considerable interest in France, French philosophy and political thought, the country’s intellectual and political life. Without suspecting it, I had come upon the chance of becoming his “expert on France” in his team.

Following his invitation, I went to see Voegelin in early October 1964 at his Institute on *Konradstrasse* in Munich. This was the beginning of my personal acquaintance with him. It lasted until shortly before his death in January 1985,

³ See Eric Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, trans., ed., and introduction by Detlev Clemens and Brendan Purcell (University of Missouri Press, 1999) in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol. 31.

¹ Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (University of Missouri Press, 2011), 120. In convening the conference on Eric Voegelin held in Budapest on 10–11 October 2024, András Láncki wisely chose this statement as the motto for the conference. I gladly express my acknowledgement to him for inspiring me by his choice to create the title of my lecture at the conference and, consequently, of this essay.

² To alleviate the surprise, if there is any, I may refer to my essay “Prophecy in Politics: The Voice of Plato,” published in Matthias Riedl and Tilo Schabert, eds., *Propheten und Prophezeiungen – Prophets and Prophecies* (Königshausen und Neumann, 2005), 41–45. It might be useful to quote here also from the obituary that appeared in *The Times*: “Eric Voegelin who died in Stanford, California, on January 19 at the age of 84, was one of the greatest political philosophers of his generation. [...] In recent years the circulation of his work among dissident intellectuals who live under the totalitarian regimes of Central Europe testified to his capacity to illuminate the experience of those who endure the regime of ideology triumphant.” (*The Times*, 5 February 1985, 12.)

kept up by letters and phone calls in the years after our last meeting. This took place in October 1980 in Florence, at the hotel where he was staying. When, after the end of our conversation in his room and our saying farewell to each other outside on the landing, I stepped down the long stairway to the ground floor, I realised, looking up, that he remained on the landing above, watching my departure, motionless, with an expression of earnestness on his face, whose meaning I understood only much later.

B. The Teacher

When he lectured, Eric Voegelin assumed the role of a performer intent on captivating his audience. He did so in a particularly impressive way during the lecture course on “Hitler and the Germans”. No wonder that he drew students into his orbit. In the large auditorium where his lectures took place, week after week, he spoke freely, only with the help of notes (though well-prepared ones). Leaving the lectern soon after he had begun speaking, he walked up and down in front of the audience, making it, with the movements of his body and the play of his hands and the expressions on his face, perceive his search for words and the flow of his thoughts. The drama of a great intellect at work could be seen unfolding, set forth by a mighty sonorous voice, that was, however, spoken by Voegelin in German, as he did in Munich, accompanied by the charm of his Viennese accent.

Eric Voegelin very much believed in the power of words, the more so if they were not only spoken but put on stage, as his chosen model, the Austrian writer and journalist Karl Kraus, had done.⁴ During this particular lecture course, he aimed at spotlighting as distinctly as possible the contrast between reality and unreality (the “second reality” of Nazism) when discussing the attitude towards human existence and human affairs. He succeeded admirably in highlighting the distinction by staging a rhetorical drama with himself as the protagonist personifying truth, the *aletheia* that with this Greek term for truth means reality revealed.

⁴ On Karl Kraus, see, for example, Edward Timms, *Karl Kraus, Apocalyptic Satirist: Culture and Catastrophe in Habsburg Vienna* (Yale University Press, 1986); Jens Malte Fischer, *Karl Kraus: Der Widersprecher. Biografie* (Zsolnay Verlag, 2020); Katharina Prager and Simon Ganahl, eds., *Karl Kraus. Leben – Werk – Wirkung* (J. B. Metzler, 2021).

C. Cooperation in Munich

In early 1965, Eric Voegelin assigned me to participate, as a student research assistant, in the pursuit of a research project on “political mass movements in the 18th and 19th centuries”, financed by the Thyssen Foundation. The grant for the project had already been awarded in 1962, but thus far, hardly any progress had been made. Now, Voegelin wished that a new start be made. A full-time research associate, Arno Baruzzi, was charged with the responsibility for advancing the project, with my own person as assistant to Baruzzi. For this new start, we decided at once to concentrate our research on eighteenth-century France. We divided up our work. Baruzzi would focus on the thought and the political impact of the French “materialists”, namely Paul-Henri Thiry, Baron d’Holbach, Claude-Adrien Helvétius, Julien Offroy de La Mettrie, and the Marquis de Sade.⁵ I would study the writings of Denis Diderot and Jean-Jacques Rousseau with the same focus. Inevitably, as it were (of course, we had read *The New Science of Politics*), the topic of “Gnosticism” was not far away. Yet, those French materialists, as Baruzzi found, had not had any gnostic aspirations, and neither had Diderot nor Rousseau, as far as I could see. The former could be ranged with the materialists, and Rousseau—well, on the contrary, he seemed to have had, as I deduced from my exhaustive study of his writings, produced an *oeuvre* of a Neo-Platonic nature.⁶ This caused much surprise, especially in conjunction with another development of our project. The path led entirely away from taking “Gnosticism” as the clue for an analysis of the “political mass movements in the 18th and 19th centuries”. Bewildered by our findings, Baruzzi showed himself unwilling or unable to resolve the problem that evidently confronted us. Yet I, protected by my naivety, decided to do something unusual, given my low status in the project. I went to see Eric Voegelin, on appointment, and told him, in plain words, of the puzzling—or promising (depending on one’s

⁵ Later on, Arno Baruzzi dealt at length with the French “materialists” in his book *Mensch und Maschine: Das Denken sub specie machinae* (Fink, 1973).

⁶ On the Neo-Platonic structure of Rousseau’s *oeuvre*, see my two essays: “Rousseau,” in Tilo Schabert, ed., *Der Mensch als Schöpfer der Welt. Formen und Phasen revolutionären Denkens in Frankreich 1762-1794* (List, 1971), 35–82; “The Paradise in Politics. A chapter in the story of negative cosmology,” in *The European Legacy*, Vol. 7, no. 3 (June 2002), 293–329. A German version of this essay was published in Tilo Schabert, *Von der Natur der Politik und ihren Formen. Kleine Schriften*, ed. Frank-Lothar Kroll (Duncker & Humblot, 2020), 105–158.

view)—status of the research project Baruzzi and I had been working on. His reaction was very much Voegelin-like: He dropped the project altogether.

A year later, I had begun to do research for a dissertation as a doctoral candidate of Voegelin's. It would be a study, we had agreed, in the field of French Enlightenment thought. Accordingly, I spent the month of August 1966 in Paris to conduct research at the institution where I would find the greatest collection of relevant books, the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, at the Rue de Richelieu.

For younger readers, it might be useful to recall that devices such as photocopying machines, not to speak of computers, did not yet exist at that time. One had to extract each passage or sentence of interest by writing it down on a blank page of one's notebook. This was the only way of gathering research material on which one could rely later at home. Of course, the whole process was very time-consuming. It imposed diligence: Arrival at the *Bibliothèque* punctually when it opened, at 9:00 a.m., and leaving it only when it closed, at 5:00 p.m. And the hours afterwards? Before I left Munich for Paris, Voegelin had, in that regard, given me the advice to continue my research in the evenings at the *Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève*, place du Panthéon. It was open until 10:00 p.m. As I gathered, he himself had done this during the year he had spent in Paris, and thus he knew what advice he could give.

As I had not yet narrowed down my research to a specific topic, I just looked around, consulting book after book. One of them, though, after I had begun reading it, struck my particular attention: *Les sources occultes du romantisme. Illuminisme, Théosophie (1770-1820)* by Auguste Viatte, published in 1928 in two volumes. The book demonstrated a widespread movement of "illuminism", "theosophy", and "spiritualism" in the second half of eighteenth-century France. Not a few adherents of it had engaged in practices of magic. Inevitably, in reading Viatte, I had what I thought to be the Neo-Platonic structure of Rousseau's work in my mind. Furthermore, I found, in remembering the purpose of the abandoned Thyssen project, that Viatte's study clearly showed a continuity of that movement well into the nineteenth century.

Upon my return to Munich, I told Eric Voegelin of Auguste Viatte's book. He immediately asked the Institute's librarian, Erich Julius Fries, to order the new edition of it, which had been published in 1965.

D. Voegelin's "Magic Turn" 1967–1968

In recent times, not a few "turns" in the areas of cultural and social studies were proclaimed, such as the "postcolonial turn", the "pictorial/iconic turn", the "post-humanist turn", and the "digital turn", to give just a few examples of what has become a plethora. Gradually, by several steps, Eric Voegelin made such a "turn" during the years 1967–1968 and stuck to it ever more firmly in the following years. I call it, not without being aware of the anachronism, "Voegelin's magic turn". Why I call it so will soon become clear, I hope.

Voegelin remained interested in Auguste Viatte's book, although his major concern at that time was the arrangement with the Hoover Institution at Stanford University regarding his appointment as Henry Salvatori Distinguished Fellow, subsequent to his retirement from the University of Munich in 1969. The arrangement with Hoover was finalised in November 1967.

At the beginning of November, in two letters, he reported on the research to which Viatte's book had led him:

"Just now I am working on the theosophic background of eighteenth century rationalism. Viatte's *Sources occultes du Romantisme* is a mine of information and quotations. I am collecting with gusto the parallels between Martines, Saint-Martin, Farbre d'Olivet, etc., on the one hand, and such ideological worthies as Diderot, Condorcet, Marx, and Comte, on the other hand."

Letter to Eric O'Connor, 3 November 1967⁷

"I am just now assembling the parallels between the history constructions of the philosophes [the French Enlightenment philosophers] and the speculations of the theosophists and illuminists (Saint-Martin, Martines, Fabre d'Olivet, etc.) What I want to show is the theosophic existential background of the apparently rationalist constructions.

⁷ Eric Voegelin, *Selected Correspondence 1950-1984*, ed. and intro. Thomas A. Hollweck; trans. Sandy Adler, Thomas A. Hollweck, and William Petropoulos (University of Missouri Press, 2007) in Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, 538.

A treasure of quotations is Viatte's *Les Sources occultes du Romantisme*, which has been reprinted in 1965."

Letter to Gregor Sebba, 3 November 1967⁸

From Gnosticism to a Wider Field of Interest and Research

In taking account of a particular sentence in a letter that Voegelin sent to Alois Dempf on 2 January 1968, we can perceive the high significance of the "turn" he had embarked on. He was about to abandon the contention he had expressed, somewhat triumphantly, in *The New Science of Politics*: Gnosticism is the essence of modernity.

In April I will give the Candler Lectures at Emory. Subject: The Drama of Humanity - a systematic philosophy of history.

I believe I have now developed the categories of a pneumopathology⁹ that is needed in order to deal with the so-called ideas from 1750 to 1950. That is impossible using the means of a "history of ideas" or a conventional *Geistesgeschichte*.

It has to do with carrying out the problems that I had taken on some time ago with the characterization of Hegel and Marx as Gnostics. It isn't as simple as I had imagined. (T. S.'s emphasis).

Letter to Alois Dempf, 2 January 1968¹⁰

A push further away from Gnosticism to a much wider and truer field of interest and research occurred when Voegelin participated in a congress held on 3–6 October 1968 at the *Istituto Academico Internazionale* in Rome. The convener of the congress was Elémire Zolla, an Italian essayist, philosopher, and historian of religions, with

mysticism as a speciality. Zolla and Voegelin understood each other well, and after the congress, they remained in contact by exchanging letters. As a result, Zolla became one of the experts Voegelin liked to consult—to "pump", in fact—in order to receive information and advice with regard to the subjects he was concerned with.¹¹ In the case of Elémire Zolla, the subjects were Renaissance Platonism, Hermeticism, and magic. Zolla certainly appreciated what Voegelin had to say at the congress. And, we can assume, he encouraged him to follow up his project, on which he reported to Gerhart Niemeyer shortly thereafter in these words: "I can advance my own work to a degree and have just delivered a paper at a Congress in Rome on the problem of *Hegel's system as a Neo-Platonic construction*." (T. S.'s own emphasis).¹²

An Additional Research Project: Order and History, Volume 0

During one of our conversations, Voegelin told me that, in matters of scholarship, it would be a wise course of action to pursue at least two different research projects, if not more, at the same time. This would stimulate one's inspiration and creativity, thus furthering the process of acquiring new knowledge. It was advice given in the mode of self-interpretation. He himself rarely used to work on one project alone.

A perfect example is his scholarly activity in the years after the autumn of 1968. While he went on to work on his book projects, "The Drama of Humanity" (never accomplished) and "The Ecumenic Age", and continued to write substantial articles ("On Hegel: A Study of Sorcery", "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme: A Meditation", "Reason: The Classic Experience"), he simultaneously employed a considerable amount of time and effort in pursuing research on the symbolic artefacts of the Palaeolithic Age. The initial spark for it was ignited when the German expert on those artefacts, Marie König, delivered "a paper on the continuous evolution of prehistoric civilizations" at the congress in October 1968 in Rome, already mentioned above.¹³ After her talk, Voegelin, as König reported, "came up to me

⁸ Voegelin, *Selected Correspondence 1950–1984*, 539.

⁹ Voegelin took this term from Schelling. See Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, trans. and ed. by Detlev Clemens and Brendan Purcell, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31 (University of Missouri Press, 1999), 101. Voegelin defines the term in this way: "This [pneumopathology] means the spirit is sick, not the soul in the sense of psychopathology: so, spiritual sickness, sickness of the spirit, pneumopathic conditions as opposed to psychopathic conditions." (Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 101–102).

¹⁰ Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, 562.

¹¹ "Zolla is one of the finest philosophical minds among the living," Voegelin wrote on 20 May 1978 to Arno Baruzzi (Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, 838).

¹² Letter to Gerhard Niemeyer, 24 October 1968 (Hoover Institution Archives, Eric Voegelin Papers, Box 27, Folder 13.)

¹³ Cf. Barry Cooper, *Paleolithic Politics. The Human Community in Early Art* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 63.

straight away and said: ‘we must work together’”.¹⁴ The more Voegelin immersed himself in the “material”—studies, travels—the more he perceived a continuation of “Order and History” backwards—Volume 0, as it were.

During the winter term 1968–69, his last one at the University of Munich, the topic on which Voegelin spoke in his weekly lectures was “Philosophy of History”. He had appointed me as a full-time assistant at the Institute after I had finished my PhD in November. Now, I would work for him full-time, indeed. During the whole term, I was busy procuring for him books on “pre-history”, “rock art”, and the “palaeolithic age” from different libraries at the University. The first photocopying machine had just arrived at the Institute. Voegelin quickly grasped the considerable utility of the machine for his work. Either he or I identified those parts of the borrowed books that seemed to be relevant to his new research project and that, consequently, he wished to have copied. I spent hours at the photocopying machine because of the huge amount of copies to be done, with a machine which was still a rough one that functioned badly and broke down when it was kept in use for too long. Once I had done my duty, I usually brought all the copies to the apartment of Lissy and Eric Voegelin at *Josephsplatz*. I was always received most cordially, and Voegelin never let me go before we had spent some time speaking in his study about what he was reading at the moment. It could be, for instance, as I remember, Shakespeare’s *King Lear* or Plato’s *Timaeus*.

E. The Magic Turn Intensified

While still in Munich, Eric Voegelin had set to work, as he reported in his letter to Gerhart Niemeyer just quoted, on the “problem of Hegel’s system as a Neo-Platonic construction”. His interest in the manifestations of Neo-Platonism, hermeticism, and magic in modern thought was well alive, and, once he had settled into his new home on 839 Sonoma Terrace at Stanford, it intensified. He had received an invitation to deliver a paper at the First Conference of the *International Society for the Study of Time*, held from 31 August to 6 September 1969 at Oberwolfach, a charming village in the Black Forest, Germany. The paper that he prepared became the first

¹⁴ Cooper, *Paleolithic Politics*, 65. On the collaboration between Voegelin and König during the following sixteen years, see Cooper, *Paleolithic Politics*, 63–102.

full-blown document of his “magic turn”: “Hegel - A study in Sorcery”.¹⁵ I quote a telling passage from the text of the paper eventually published:

The sectarian spirituals of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the godded men and *homines novi*, were followed in the eighteenth century by the occultists, visionaries, and *Schwärmer*, by the illuminists and theosophs, by the Swedenborg, Martinez, Saint-Martin, and Cagliostro, by Lavater, Jung-Stilling, and so forth. Beginning with the French Revolution, then, a cloud of New Christs descended on the Western World – Saint Simon, Fourier, Comte, Fichte, and Hegel himself. The life-time of Hegel (1770–1831) runs parallel with the period studied by Auguste Viatte in his *Les Sources Occultes du Romantisme, 1770–1820* (1927; 1965). Hegel’s own inwardness is firmly related to Jacob Boehme and the German Pietists.¹⁶

Eric Voegelin greatly liked—not rarely with a touch of boasting—to spread the word about his “discoveries” to the persons he was talking with and to his correspondents alike. Such findings he also extended to whoever he answered in response to a query. Thus, for example, he wrote to Friedrich Engel-Janosi on 3 February 1970:

Just now I must work on completion of the Hegel essay for a few days. I have discovered that Hegel was a magician and that he wrote the Phenomenology consciously as a book of magic that would call forth the shape of the future.¹⁷

¹⁵ Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 12, *Published Essays: 1966–1985*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (University of Missouri Press, 1990), 213–55.

¹⁶ Voegelin, *Collected Works*, 216. Voegelin’s text was first published in *Studium Generale*, no. 24, 1971, 335–368. In his letters, Voegelin often wrote about what, in his scholarly work, he was currently concerned with. When he wrote, on 30 July 1969, a letter to Stephen J. Tonsor, his study in “Hegel’s sorcery” was quite likely on his mind: “The depth of the psyche is not a Christian *de profundis*, but the quite authentic understanding of divinity present in the order of the cosmos peculiar to the philosophy on the depth emerging from myth. This cosmological experience of depth has remained a constant in Western history from the *Timaeus* through Neoplatonism of Antiquity, and the Renaissance into the Neoplatonism of the German Pietists, Jakob Boehme, and Hegel.”

¹⁷ Letter to Friedrich Engel-Janosi, 3 February 1970 (Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, 644). The essay of which Voegelin spoke in this letter was, of course, his “Hegel - A study in Sorcery” (see notes 15 and 16).

In July 1970, he replied to an inquiry from Richard J. Bishirjian by sharing with the latter the latest news from his scholarly work:

There is, first of all, the great History of Magic by Thorndike. For the period that interests you principally there are the two volumes by Auguste Viatte, *Les sources occultes du Romantisme*. The work came out in 1927 but the second edition of 1965 contains a survey of the literature published since. For the early history of gnostic magic and alchemy one has to consult Festugiere, *La Revelation d'Hermes Trismegiste*, especially the first volume.

Just recently there has come out Francois Dumas, *Le Magicien du Dieu* (Paris, 1970), with valuable sources for the white magic of the 18th century which contains all the categories that have become the principal categories in Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud.¹⁸

In November 1970, he met Elémire Zolla again in Rome, this time together with Mario Praz, a critic of art and literature and a scholar of English literature as well.¹⁹ The subjects on which they conversed were *Neo-Platonism*, alchemy, and astrology. Besides, Zolla and Praz shared their knowledge of Mannerism and Hermeticism with Voegelin.

In a long letter to Arian Mack, editor of the journal *Social Research*, dated 22 January 1971, Voegelin summed up what he had gathered from his conversations with Mario Praz and what, in the context of his “magic turn”, appeared to him as insights that he had newly “discovered”:

In recent conversations with Mario Praz in Rome, we agreed that a good deal of contemporary politics belongs to the class of surrealist phenomena, which are the latest phase in the line running from Mannerism through Romanticism and Symbolism to the present. [...]

¹⁸ Letter to Richard J. Bishirjian, 27 July 1970 (Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, 663).

¹⁹ Praz had published in 1930 a book that was of particular interest to Voegelin: *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica* (Società editrice La Cultura, 1930). An English translation of the book was published in 1933 by Oxford University Press, under the title *The Romantic Agony*.

If anything is characteristic of the 20th century, it is [...] that the public scene is dominated by thought forms widely differing from philosophy. [...] Beyond what I have to say here, I have discovered that, beginning with the Mannerism of the 16th century, medieval and Renaissance alchemy has assumed new forms. With Parmigianino²⁰ all become[s] an alchemistic opus, and the same is true of the speculative system, be it that of Fichte, Hegel, Comte or Marx.²¹

F. Collaboration at Stanford

In June 1970, Eric Voegelin invited me to join him at the Hoover Institution as a research fellow. During the two years that I could spend at Stanford University thanks to the invitation, I actively participated in his work. As I described it elsewhere,²² he called me on the phone almost every day, quite early in the morning, usually to discuss with me what he had written the night before or to ask me what I thought about this or that book or topic with which he was momentarily concerned. Once or twice a week, such scholarly sessions also took place in person, either in his office, late in the morning, or at night, after an invitation to dinner, when the other guests had left, and Voegelin had resolutely conducted me to his study.

He was particularly interested in my research on the “mystical”, “theosophical”, and “pietist” currents of thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I was studying, for example, the writings of Jakob Böhme,²³ Gottfried Arnold,²⁴ and Valentin Weigel.²⁵ I informed him about what I had learned and also brought him a heap of photocopies, already provided with my markings. We followed the same procedure after I had read the scholarly studies on the

²⁰ Parmigianino was an Italian painter who lived from 1503 to 1540. For further information, see: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Parmigianino>. As to the alchemistic aspect of his painting, see: https://arthive.com/de/publications/4651~Parmigianinos_Path_from_a_Young_Talent_to_a_Mad_Alchemist.

²¹ Letter to Arian Mack, 22 January 1971 (Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, 693).

²² See my article “Eric Voegelin’s Workshop: A Study in Confirmation of Barry Cooper’s Genetic Paradigm” in *Hunting and Weaving. Empiricism and Political Philosophy*, eds. Thomas Heilke and John von Heyking (St. Augustin’s Press, 2013), 232–251.

²³ On Jakob Böhme, see: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jacob-Bohme>.

²⁴ On Gottfried Arnold, see: [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Arnold,Gottfried\(1666-1714\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Arnold,Gottfried(1666-1714)).

²⁵ On Valentin Weigel, see: <https://www.crystalinks.com/weigel.html>.

Renaissance Platonists, Hermeticism, the Rosicrucians, Magic, and Alchemists, published by D. P. Walker, Frances Yates, Alexandre Koyré, and others. Sometimes, when I had come across only a few pertinent sentences or passages, I dictated them to Voegelin's secretary, Ursula Sens, and she left the pages with the quotations on the desk in his office.

All this relates to the "magic turn". In early 1971, Marie König sent him the manuscript of the book that presented her research on petroglyphs in the Palaeolithic Age. Voegelin felt that the theoretical side of the text was not entirely satisfactory. He asked me to go through the manuscript in order to "uplift it theoretically". After he had approved or, in some cases, slightly altered my suggestions, the revised manuscript was returned to Marie König. She graciously accepted what we had done.²⁶

Throughout this time of cooperation, I could not help being increasingly impressed by his obstinate insistence on an impeccable empiricism in one's scholarly work. He certainly observed this rule in his own work, as I observed on so many occasions. Logically, he judged others according to it as well. He had, he thought, a good reason for being uncompromising in this respect: As to the truth of scholarly insights and scholarly communication, the textual "reality", i.e., the "material" of which he liked to speak, is the judge, not the preconceived "methods" or "views" of a scholar. Out of respect for the material, Voegelin applied to himself the rule—as a golden one, so to speak—to read the texts that he studied in the original language: not only in German and English but also in French, Italian, Classical Greek, Latin, and Biblical Hebrew (with, at times, a rudimentary grasp of Russian and Chinese). Any knowledge of reality began for him with linguistic skills.

The Magic Turn

Gnosticism had lost its importance for the scholarly pursuits of Eric Voegelin when he lectured in August 1977 at the annual Eranos Conference in Ascona, Switzerland.²⁷ The "magic turn", on the other hand, was in full swing. This is already made obvious by the second part of the title that he chose for his lecture: *Wisdom*

²⁶ Marie König, *Am Anfang der Kultur. Die Zeichensprache des frühen Menschen* (Mann, 1973).

²⁷ As to the Eranos Conferences, see Tilo Schabert, ed. *The Eranos Movement: A Story of Hermeneutics* (Königshausen & Neumann, 2016).

and the Magic of the Extreme: A Meditation.²⁸ What modern thinkers such as Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche had undertaken in their work, Voegelin argued, was "magic" or, in more precise terms, attempts at magical operations. In his lecture, he then set about to confront these attempts with the "wisdom"—hence the first part of the lecture's title—of classical authors: Heraclitus, Thucydides, Cicero, Shakespeare, and, in particular, Plato. Consequently, the greater part of the lecture dwells on this wisdom: a multitude of categories, analytical terms, psychological observations, and philosophical insights are summoned up, which had already been used to describe and analyse the pathology of thought diagnosed in Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. In an impressively exemplary way, Voegelin demonstrated what can be "regained" by a "recourse to thinkers of the past who had not yet lost contact with reality". In the light of classical wisdom, the pathology of thought was precisely laid bare that seduced Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche into attempting magical operations. The two sides were clearly set against one another: truth vs. delusion, authenticity vs. unreality, clear-sightedness vs. fantasy. As an act of true philosophy, *Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme* is simply masterful.

By the end of 1978, Eric Voegelin had reached, with regard to his long and intensive enquiries into the para-philosophical currents in modern thought, a point of saturation. In a way, the "material" had sufficiently been explored and evaluated. Besides, he had put the results of his research into a theoretical frame of reference. The moment had come for a summary reassessment, as presented, for example, by Voegelin on 19 December 1978 in a letter to Abraham Rotstein, a professor of economics based in Toronto:

Your exploration of the Apocalyptic Tradition seems to run into the same type of problem into which I have run with my exploration of the Gnostic strand since antiquity. Nothing is wrong with your conception of the Apocalyptic strand, on the contrary, your research is urgently necessary to clear that component and I have expressed myself to that effect in my opinion. But: there are simply a great number of such traditional strands. I can identify the following: Gnosticism,

²⁸ For the publication of the text into which Voegelin developed his lecture, see Voegelin, "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme: A Meditation," in *Collected Works*, Vol. 12, 315–375.

Apocalyptic, Hermeticism, Alchemy, Neoplatonism (especially in the form it assumed through Ficino and Pico della Mirandola), and Magic. If you try to isolate one of them, you always run into the difficulty that it proves to be inseparable from the other five.²⁹

G. One “Failure”

When, in the morning of 16 February 1971, Voegelin called me on the phone, he abruptly began the conversation by asking me whether I had ever come across the term “egophany”. Somewhat bewildered, I felt at a loss, for, indeed, I didn’t know the word, had never heard of it, nor had I seen it somewhere in a text. What else could I do, feeling a bit embarrassed, other than respond to the question in the negative? Or should I suspect that he had allowed himself a joke? That Voegelin was in good humour and had the idea to start our conversation with something nonsensical, just for fun?

In the end, I said, “No,” and, having overcome my bewilderment, I asked him the same question in return. Had he himself somewhere come across the term “egophany”? Obviously enjoying the situation, he made an announcement: He had, he declared, not without a touch of solemnity, “invented” the term last night. In contrast to the term “theophany”. The modern notion of the “Ego” was, as we both of course knew, associated with the idea that in its fully accomplished, “absolute” form, it had the property of divinity. According to Christian theology, it was *God* who revealed himself in an act of “theophany”. In speaking of an “egophany”, Voegelin claimed that the modern God-like “Ego” also owned the capacity of absolute self-revelation.

I immediately put in a word of protest. Although I well understood how Voegelin’s formal logic led to this parallelism between “theophany” and “egophany”, I found that it was based on a fallacy, which, in fact, made it invalid. The term “theophany”, to be meaningful, presupposes a God who *is*, who exists. Something like that cannot be said with regard to the concept of “egophany”. In this case, the divine Ego is a pure projection. So far, up to 1971, a human Ego that truly *is* God had been seen nowhere, far and wide. It just doesn’t make sense, I said sharply, to cling

to a term such as “egophany”. Voegelin had listened patiently to what I had been saying and concluded this part of our morning conversation with the polite remark that he would think about what I had said.

My intervention was a failure. “Egophany” became part of Eric Voegelin’s theoretical vocabulary.

H. By Way of Conclusion: Voegelin’s Five Principles of Scholarship

In writing this text, I have had the opportunity to record, among other things, my observations of Eric Voegelin “at work”. And to record the advice with regard to scholarly work that could either be drawn from these observations or that Voegelin himself conveyed in the course of our conversations. I think it might be useful to pass on, by way of conclusion, what, in a summary form, could be called “Voegelin’s principles of scholarship”. There are five of them:

- (1) Reality is your guide, not any method or school of thought.
- (2) You know that you are “original” if and when you discover that someone else has had the same idea that you have.
- (3) Do occupy your mind with simultaneously pursuing research on at least two different subjects.
- (4) Do pump other scholars, old and young, for material from their work that might be useful for you.
- (5) In the case of new insights, do them justice. Revise, restart, retract, however painful this might be.

²⁹ Letter to Abraham Rotstein, 19 December 1978 (Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, 844f.).

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE BOOK

Barry Cooper is Professor of Political Science at the University of Calgary.

James Greenaway is Professor at Philosophy Department and the San José-Loneragan Chair in Catholic Philosophy, St. Mary's University.

András Láncki is the Director of the European Center of Political Philosophy at Mathias Corvinus Collegium.

Tilo Schabert is Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany.

James R. Stoner, Jr. is Hermann Moyse Jr. Professor and Director of the Eric Voegelin Institute in the Department of Political Science, Louisiana State University.

Árpád Szakolczai is Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University College Cork.

Lee Trepanier is Dean of the D'Amour College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Assumption University.

John von Heyking is Associate Director/Professor at the School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership, Arizona State University.

David Walsh is Professor Emeritus of Politics at The Catholic University of America.

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