

ERIC VOEGELIN'S THOUGHT AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE  
FOR POLITICAL THEOLOGY

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SUBMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS  
DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

MARCH, 1990

## ABSTRACT

The philosopher Eric Voegelin (1901-85) held that at the heart of an adequate political philosophy must be a philosophy of consciousness. This study discusses Voegelin's thought in its significance for "political theology", by which is understood that mode of theological thinking which focuses on the relationship of Christian faith to the pursuit of social justice.

The study falls into two parts. Part One is an exposition of Voegelin's thought with the perspective of political theology continuously in mind. Chapter One justifies the choice of this perspective. There follow chapters on the symbol of the *metaxy*, which Voegelin takes from Plato and which is fundamental to his thought, and on the rational structure of symbols and their articulation. Then the modes of symbolic discourse most important for Voegelin are considered in turn: myth, classical philosophy, Christian theology, history, and politics. Part One finishes with a discussion of Voegelin's work on the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

Part Two concentrates on three topics central to the concerns of Voegelin and political theologians alike. Besides being intrinsically important, these topics permit one to estimate how valuable is Voegelin's work as a resource for political theology. The topics are the relationship between individual and societal transformation; the scope and limits of Christian hope for the attainment of a just social order within history; and the nature of political responsibility and irresponsibility in the light of faith. The thesis ends with a summary of its conclusions.

It is argued that Voegelin's thought offers a powerful and constructive challenge to political theologians, but that political theology in turn provides a vantage point which reveals certain serious shortcomings in Voegelin's powerful thought. In particular, it is argued that Voegelin fails to articulate adequately the social implications of his own philosophical principles.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXT

- AM** - Eric Voegelin            *Autobiographical Memoir*  
(This is a typed transcript, as yet unpublished, of  
taped interviews given in 1973 by Voegelin to Prof-  
essor Ellis Sandoz. It is lodged at the Hoover  
Institution.)
- An-G** - Eric Voegelin            *Anamnesis* (German edition),  
1966
- An-E** - Eric Voegelin            *Anamnesis* (English edition),  
1978
- Conv** - R. Eric O'Connor        *Conversations with Eric*  
*Voegelin*, 1980
- ER** - Eric Voegelin            *From Enlightenment to*  
*Revolution*, 1975
- Hoov** - Unpublished papers held in the Voegelin Archive  
of the Hoover Institution
- NSP** - Eric Voegelin            *The New Science of Politics*,  
1952
- OH** - Eric Voegelin            *Order and History*
- Vol I**    *Israel and Revelation*, 1958
- Vol II**   *The World of the Polis*, 1957
- Vol III**   *Plato and Aristotle*, 1957
- Vol IV**   *The Ecumenic Age*, 1974
- Vol V**    *In Search of Order*, 1987
- SPG** - Eric Voegelin            *Science, Politics and*  
*Gnosticism*, 1968

All works other than these will be identified by the author's name plus the year of publication. Full details of the above works are given in the bibliography.

Note

In quoting from writings by and about Voegelin, I have altered American-English spelling and punctuation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I offer grateful thanks to the staff, faculty and students of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies in Leeds for their help in many ways, academic and other. My foremost debt there is owed to my supervisor, Professor Adrian Hastings.

Outside Leeds, I have had illuminating conversations on Voegelin with Geoffrey Price in Manchester, with Joseph McCarroll and Brendan Purcell in Dublin, and with Paul Caringella and Michael Morrissey in California, where I also had the great pleasure of meeting Mrs. Lissy Voegelin. All of these were unstinting with their time. The staff of the Hoover Institution at Stanford extended me every courtesy for almost a month.

The people of the parish of the Holy Rosary in Leeds made my residence there most happy. I am particularly thankful for all that I have received from Siobhan Caffrey and Jim Leavy there, and from Brian McClorry and Jeanette Ward at the Leeds Catholic Chaplaincy. The Jesuit Community in Manchester has showed me patience and kindness in the last few obsessive months.

Finally I wish to thank the two successive Provincials of the British Province of the Society of Jesus who have allowed me the time - I was about to say, the leisure - to carry out this study.

**PART ONE**

CHAPTER ONE  
ERIC VOEGELIN AND POLITICAL THEOLOGY

The Life's Work of Eric Voegelin

Eric Voegelin (1901-85) recalled in 1977,

In 1943 I had arrived at a dead-end in my attempts to find a theory of man, society, and history that would permit an adequate interpretation of the phenomena in my chosen field of studies. The analysis of the movements of Communism, National Socialism, and racism, of constitutionalism, liberalism, and authoritarianism had made it clear beyond a doubt that the centre of a philosophy of politics had to be a theory of consciousness: but the academic institutions of the Western world . . . did not offer the intellectual instruments that would make the political events and movements intelligible.

This curious default of the school philosophies in the face of an overwhelming political reality had attracted my attention ever since I was a graduate student in the 1920s (An-E: 3).

By 1943, in other words, Voegelin held that political movements are essentially *articulations of consciousness*, dependent upon the vitality of the self-interpretations that underpin them. Therefore, as a philosopher and a "spiritual realist", his proper response to the overwhelming reality was to understand those movements and make them intelligible, rather than to ally himself with one movement among others:

If the realist would throw himself into the general melee as one of the contestants, he would defeat his philosophical purpose. In order to be heard he would have to become a partisan himself, and in order to become a partisan he would have to surrender the standards of rationality. If on the other hand he has sufficient spiritual strength as well as philosophical consciousness to take his position beyond the disorder of the age, . . . he

will remain socially ineffective to the point of not even being understood (quoted in Cooper, 1986: ix).

This grim explanation of 1945 approaches the threshold of despair. For if partisanship "would defeat his philosophical purpose", so, surely, would a thorough failure to be understood by the age. Such a failure would threaten to reduce his philosophy to the retrospective interpretation of social calamity.

Any such dejection never discouraged Voegelin from a lifelong and unremitting dedication to the search for understanding. Stupid responses to his work, after all, would only confirm its urgency. He claimed, in fact, that his stance of deliberate impartiality provoked others into wilful misrepresentations of his thought:

I have in my files the documents according to which I am a Communist, a Fascist, a National Socialist, an old Liberal, a new Liberal, a Catholic, a Protestant . . . . This list I consider of some importance, because the various characterizations of course always name the pet *bête noir* of the respective critic. . . . critics of this type can become objects of enquiry but they cannot be partners in a discussion (AM: 46).

It must be said that Voegelin's stance was clear, at least, to the Nazis. Writers manifest their convictions by their very selection of subject-matter. In a sequence of books during the 1930s Voegelin had courageously examined the National Socialist imagery of race. After the *Anschluss* he was immediately sacked from his university post and had to flee Vienna to elude the Gestapo. As it turned out, though, in preparing his escape he attracted the suspicion of the American vice-consul in Zurich:

I was neither a Communist, nor a Catholic, nor a Jew and therefore had no reason whatsoever not to be in favour of National Socialism and be a National Socialist myself. . . . That anybody could be anti-National Socialist without being motivated by an ideological counter-position, or because he was a

Jew, is, indeed, as far as my experience goes, inconceivable to most people in the academic world whom I know (AM: 43-44).

There is a familiar but pointed observation of politically committed theorists, that neutrality amounts to tacit or indirect support for those in power.' Such an accusation cannot reasonably be directed at Voegelin. He is keenly aware of the corruption by which an intellectual can act as a servile *ancilla potestatis* (QH IV: 200-01). To be free from partisanship entails "neutrality" only if all parties equally deserve to be praised and condemned. He himself dismissively characterizes such neutrality in the course of reviewing an American book on Soviet politics. It succeeds in steering a safe course between "adulatory comrades" and enemies of the Soviet system, but

an objectivity due to equidistance from two parochialisms does not rise very high above the level on which the exaggerated distortions occur (1946d: 214).

On the contrary, a rational, publicly conducted search for intelligibility entails the exposure of relevant falsehood. In this sense "neutrality" is itself a strenuous commitment, and is potentially a politically charged activity. If they had thought his theorizing politically irrelevant, the Nazis would certainly have wished to leave in peace a prominent (and Aryan) intellectual.

Voegelin, in fact, considered philosophy not merely as an theoretical discipline, but as a mode of *resistance to disorder*. In a passage that seems decisive for his own self-understanding, he recounts how Plato (428/27-347 B.C.) was a young man at the time of the rule of the Thirty Tyrants and their overthrow by the democratic party. According to the autobiographical *Seventh Letter*, Plato was invited to participate in the administration of the Thirty, but was soon disenchanted: he was shocked by

the policy of the Tyrants, well-known in our own time, to consolidate their regime by involving citizens, among them Socrates, in criminal actions which would make them reliable supporters because a change of the regime would expose them to the vengeance of the victims (OH III: 4).

Plato "withdrew in disgust from the oligarchic regime". But the returned democrats, though moderate on the whole, ignored Socrates's earlier defiance of the Tyrants, charged him with impiety, and executed him.

[Plato] had understood that participation in the politics of Athens was senseless if the purpose of politics was the establishment of just order; he had, furthermore, seen that the situation in the other Hellenic poleis was just as bad as in Athens, if not worse; and above all he had understood (what modern political reformers and revolutionaries seem to be unable to understand) that a reform cannot be achieved by a well-intentioned leader who recruits his followers from the very people whose moral confusion is the source of disorder. When he had gained these insights in the course of fifteen years, he did not fall, however, into despair or sullen resignation, but resolved on that "effort of an almost miraculous kind" to renew the order of Hellenic civilization out of the resources of his own love of wisdom, fortified by the paradigmatic life and death of the most just man, Socrates (Ibid: 5).

Voegelin speaks of philosophy as an *imitatio Socratis*: He contends that to devote one's life to "the search for truth" does not renounce political responsibility along with party allegiance. On the contrary the search for truth *itself* promotes the establishment of just order.

Philosophy is not a doctrine of right order, but the light of wisdom that falls on the struggle; and help is not a piece of information about truth, but the arduous effort to locate the forces of evil and identify their nature (Ibid: 62-63).

In contending that political movements are ultimately articulations of consciousness, Voegelin does not, of course, deny that such movements also, for instance, reflect economic interests or class structures. Rather, it specifies the nature of philosophy's own proper

contribution to political society, and insists on its urgency.

Nevertheless, it is not mere wilfulness that leads such a scholar as Thomas Altizer, whose "admirable perspicacity" is acknowledged by Voegelin himself, to the view that "Voegelin, like Ricoeur, is radical and reactionary at once and altogether, thus baffling all who attempt to employ him either for political or theological ends" (Altizer, 1975: 758).

In the first place, the disdainful tone in which Voegelin identifies "modern political reformers and revolutionaries" as intellectually blind seems ominous. All of them, one wonders? This tone is quite pervasive, especially in his less formal writings and lectures. It might suggest that he would require nascent political movements to abstain from all concrete action till they had attained freedom from any possible moral confusion (thereby disabling any movement that heeded him). We shall see that Voegelin is by no means a naive moral purist: but also that there may be grounds for Altizer's use of the word "reactionary". Voegelin's readers will profitably be alert for any consistent difference of tone between his allusions to ruling groups and to "reformers and revolutionaries".

Secondly, Voegelin's conception of the "struggle" may well be too restrictive to satisfy those engaged in a search for social justice. In an essay of 1981, "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme", he refers to his attempt to recover "certain structures of consciousness whose repression by the public unconscious is one of the causes of the contemporary disorder" (1981: 287). This statement characterizes his lifelong effort; according to a short paper of 1973, "On Classical Studies", his research into classical philosophy was not impelled by antiquarianism, but by his belief that "the Greek differentiation



of reason in existence has set critical standards for the exploration of consciousness behind which nobody is permitted to fall back" (1973a: 5). But an anecdote in the same paper suggests that he envisages the "struggle" primarily as one of individual intellectual authenticity. He recalls with approval the occasion when the participants in a conference on comparative religion were challenged by one of their number over the disparity between their scholarly work and their everyday opinions:

One could not forever explore "religious phenomena", and pretend to their importance, without unreservedly professing that man's search for the divine ground of his existence, as well as the revelatory presence of God in the motivation of the search, constituted his humanity; in brief he confronted them with the question of truth implied in their admirable achievement as historians. Not everybody present was pleased by such tactlessness (*Ibid*: 7).

Now, it is legitimate to demand that scholars seek to integrate their lives with their thought. But if Voegelin means by his challenge that one's humanity is *entirely* constituted by one's search for the divine ground and one's response to the divine presence so revealed (and the word "constituted" has connotations of exclusiveness), then political and communal concerns become secondary. If, however, membership of society is also a constitutive dimension of being human, then any tendency to depreciate the practical expressions of such membership would seriously distort Voegelin's account of human and political existence, by severing the transcendent and the concretely historical dimensions of human existence.<sup>2</sup>

The matter is important because Voegelin's significance as a philosopher is being increasingly recognized. In the article cited above, Altizer called him "certainly one of the major thinkers of our time", whose volume *Israel and Revelation* "may some day be perceived as the most important work of Old Testament scholarship ever written in the United States" and who is "at once a Greek

scholar of first rank and a philosophical mind equal or superior to any in America today" (Altizer, 1975: 757). It is not necessary to arbitrate such claims; but it is worth noting that they can be made by a scrupulous scholar who is not uncritical of Voegelin.

Since Voegelin's death in 1985, his reputation in the U.S.A. has led to the founding of the Eric Voegelin Institute for American Renaissance Studies at Louisiana State University, and of a Voegelin archive at the Hoover Institution, Stanford, California. The publication in the U.S.A. of a college textbook in which his philosophical framework is applied to the study of world religions suggests that he now belongs to the academic mainstream there (Carmody & Carmody, 1987). Most notably, the massive project of publishing *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin* has been undertaken.<sup>3</sup> As yet, though, his work is little known in Britain.

### The Nature and Situation of Political Theology

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss and evaluate Voegelin's thought from a particular standpoint, that of its significance for political theology. By "political theology" I mean the theology which takes as its focus the relationship between Christian faith and the pursuit of social justice. In this formulation the word "focus" is not a synonym for "content" or "subject matter". Political theologians would not accept that they merely choose one topic, that of politics, among many others of equally legitimate theological concern. They claim that political theology is a fundamental theology, distinctive less by its content than by its methodology and by the sources of its theorizing. Its thrust may be primarily critical, as in the work of such writers as Johann Baptist Metz, Jürgen Moltmann, and Dorothee Sölle; or, like "liberation theology", it may tend rather towards prophetic advocacy.

A point of terminology must first be clarified. Francis Fiorenza (1975b, 1977) distinguishes "political theology" from "liberation theology" (though he discusses them in connection with each other). He takes the German writers, Metz, Moltmann and Sölle as representative political theologians, and associates liberation theology with Latin Americans such as Leonardo Boff, Gustavo Gutiérrez and Juan Luis Segundo. For the purposes of this thesis, however, it is more useful to adopt the usage of Alfredo Fierro (1977: 17-19). Fierro speaks of "political theologies" in the plural, while accepting that the differences among them are sometimes acute and that reciprocal (though rarely hostile) criticism abounds. The different schools "agree in projecting a theology that is practical, public and critical", and it is this shared ground which constitutes "a shift of major importance in theology" (*Ibid*: 19).

The point of Fiorenza's distinction must nevertheless be borne in mind. The German theologians tend to work out a critical response to secularization, to the alienations of market society, and to the supposed individualism of existentialist theology. The Latin Americans are primarily concerned by the failure of "developmentalism" and the economic exploitation of their continent by the great powers (Gutiérrez, 1973: 21-42). They would criticize any implication that the European secularized situation is universal; as for their own work, it seems to them that to overlook the economic and political dependencies characteristic of Latin America would render "political theology" "apolitical". They regard their main challenge to be not unbelief (and its political consequences) but the virtual dehumanization of whole societies (Forrester, 1988: 64).<sup>4</sup>

To clarify the object of our attention, ten characteristics of political theology are now identified. ■

1. Political theology sees itself as a critical corrective of other modern theology. It rejects any privatized account of the nature of faith as an inherently distorted response to the gospel, a response which "delivers faith up to modern ideologies in the area of societal and political theory" (Metz, 1968, 111).

Matthew Lamb (1978: 4-54) offers a typology by which political theology is contrasted with:-

a. "Palaeomorphic theologies", which mediate between faith and culture through accepting some earlier cultural form as normative. To use Lonergan's terminology, such theologies are "classicist" (1974: 231-38).

b. "Neomorphic theologies", which take contemporary forms of reason and culture as normative (e.g. Protestant "liberal theology", and Roman Catholic "modernism").

c. "Fideomorphic theologies", which accentuate the opposition between the truth-intention of faith and the norms of any cultural matrix (e.g. the theology of Barth, and some "pentecostalist" theologies).

d. "Criticomorphic theologies", which attempt to do justice to the valid articulations of types (a) to (c), while criticizing the exclusivism they have in common. Unlike types (a) to (c), criticomorphic theologies are aware of their own grounding; they are fully aware of the historical nature of subjectivity, without allowing subjectivity to be dissolved by any kind of cultural determinism.<sup>6</sup>

e. "Political theology" accepts the positive insights of criticomorphic theologies, but criticizes their failure to recognize how far the supposed "ground" of each theology is instead a *reflection* of social interests.<sup>7</sup>

2. Political theology is "reconstructive": it is not satisfied with critique alone, but attempts to "determine anew the relation between religion and society, between

Church and societal 'publicness', between eschatological faith and societal life" (Metz, 1969: 111).

Two examples may be offered of what is meant by this. Lamb (1978: 46-48) suggests that political theology is distinctive in that it takes seriously the "dialectic of the Enlightenment", "in the sense of the fundamentally new possibilities of freedom on the one hand, and the enormous threats to human dignity on the other".<sup>8</sup> In accepting this dialectic, political theology logically rejects the "Christendom" model, "the direct and immediate translation of Christianity into concrete socio-political institutions" (Fierro, 1977: 49, cf. also, Gutierrez 1973: 53-61; Metz, 1970: 37; Sölle, 1974: 3-6).

A second example of "reconstruction" is Fiorenza's discussion of the relationship between the Church's religious identity and its socio-political mission (1984: 195-245). He describes how the Church's social mission has variously been deemed to be improper, subsidiary and temporary, unofficial, partial, and constitutive; and then discusses the principles by which the disagreement might be resolved.

3. Contemporary political theologians take pains to distinguish the discipline from what has sometimes gone by the same name, namely a form of theology which simply underwrites some dominant political movement, rationalizing a prior world-view of which the foundations are, in fact, non-theological.<sup>9</sup> In fact, because in Germany the term *politische Theologie* recalls the theology which endorsed nationalist ideologies, Sölle prefers to speak of the "political interpretation of the Gospel". However, because the usual English term for a discourse that accepts the function of buttressing the existing political power is "civil religion", the anglicized term "political theology" scarcely prompts the same misleading associations.<sup>10</sup>

4. Contemporary political theology does not equate "politics" with the activities of the state, the government, or formal political parties (Fierro, 1977: 184; Lakeland, 1984: 10). It deliberately steps behind the domination of the political imagination by the nation-state to retrieve the Aristotelian conception of politics as *that which contributes to the good of the community* - a subject to which even ethics itself is no more than introductory (Aristotle, 1955: 64). Any activity which influences the way society is governed, which affects a society's perception of its governors, or which modifies the relationship between the governors and those they represent, is "political". From such a wide definition of politics, it naturally follows that those with no party allegiance and those who hold no public office do not thereby render themselves "apolitical".<sup>11</sup>

To accept this broad notion of the scope of politics does not preclude one's sometimes using the word "political" in a more specific sense: for example, to designate the kind of decision about economic policy which logically cannot be made on economic grounds alone:

In an industrial democracy there is commonly a conflict between economic growth and social justice and when a choice has to be made two opposing propositions will be advanced. The first will aver that if priority is given to justice growth will be inhibited, the second that if priority is given to growth justice will be delayed. This conflict between social and economic ends can be resolved only by political means (Calvocoressi, 1979: 169).

Political theology does not consider itself bound always to be "political" in this latter, more restricted sense.<sup>12</sup>

5. Political theology tends not to prescribe particular political programmes or allegiances. As Metz explains this restraint: "the Church is a particular institution in society, yet presents a universal claim; if this claim

is not to be an ideology, it can only be formulated and urged as *criticism*' (1969: 123, author's emphasis). Even if theology's critical potential is universal, its commendations are necessarily specific and local. To affirm theology's "contextuality" is to acknowledge its legitimate diversity (Forrester, 1988: 150-51). Segundo argues that a theology which claims universal applicability is inherently conservative, because it "lacks any *here-and-now* criteria for judging our real situation" (1977: 8-9).<sup>13</sup>

6. There is a tendency, however, for theologians of both "schools" to endorse some form of socialism -- in striking contrast to previous generations of politically concerned theologians, such as those of the French Restoration (Fiorenza, 1977: 159-66). Naturally, this endorsement occurs in different degrees, ranging from explicit advocacy (Fierro, Segundo, Sölle) to an unstated sympathy which the reader readily infers from the direction of a writer's criticisms. Speaking from his own perspective, Segundo contends that his decision for socialism is not universal, but depends on the particular modes of capitalism and socialism available to Latin America (1974: 115). Such judgments, according to Segundo's special use of the term are "ideological"; that is, they bring faith to bear on concrete situations.<sup>14</sup>

Fierro, equally explicit, goes still further than does Segundo, working out what possibilities remain for theology *once historical materialism is decisively accepted* (1977; 364). Others are more cautious: their positive choices are implicit in their "determinate negations", in their "critical contestation of socio-political conditions" (Metz, 1970: 37). (They might, indeed, direct their criticism against what is dominant just because it is dominant, without implying that it is uniquely evil.) Thus Metz, in an address to a group of West German Social Democrats, acknowledges that he uses

the term "socialist" in a positive sense, while he has "made critical use" of "bourgeois" and "capitalist" - by which, in this context, he means that he has used them as terms of depreciation. He admits that such a usage is problematic (1981: 80-81).<sup>15</sup>

What is "problematic" is not the fact that the terms are elusive. It might be said that the terms "Christian" and "adult" are equally so. We need category-words, even though no categories are neatly self-contained. But danger arises when the language slides between the empirical and the frankly emotive. In Metz's address, "socialism" has no determinate content which might in its turn have to be negated.

Similarly, Moltmann offers an account of five "ways towards the political liberation of man" (1974: 332-35; cf. also 1984: 110). It is true that these ways do not amount to a "programme" of the kind discussed by our fifth point. They are, in general, "utopian" goals which few would reject; such as "peace with nature", liberation from the vicious circle of pollution, and "a significant life filled with a sense of the whole" (liberation from "senselessness and godforsakenness"). But first among the five ways is an option for *socialism*, based on the unargued and non-theological premiss that "the vicious circle of poverty can be broken only through economic co-determination and control of economic power by the producers". Moltmann writes, "If and in so far as socialism . . . means the satisfaction of material need and social justice in a material democracy, *socialism is the symbol for the liberation of men from the vicious circle of poverty*" (emphasis in original). Moltmann does not claim that any particular socialist party or regime meets his specifications. But it is reckless to mix empirical and symbolic language so casually: especially so, in view of the formidable body of thought deriving from Max Weber which holds state socialism to be not a



liberation from capitalism but a malign intensification of its rationalizing spirit (Weber, 1947: 48-50).<sup>16</sup> The issue at stake here is the political responsibility of political theology's own discourse.

7. The apparent discrepancy between political theology's suspicion of party programmes and its affinity with socialism is explained by its characteristic adoption of an intermediate commitment, the "option for the poor". This option is not a "programme" in that the poor are not taken as a designated class of people who can be identified apart from a critical and continuing social analysis: they are those people who in practice suffer the burden of social injustice. In case of a successful revolution, for example, those who take a consistent option for the poor would not be bound to the newly established power, even if they had previously supported it, but would seek to be aware of those groups who might be newly victimized by the revolution's very success. The option would prompt an affirmation of socialism in the specific case that socialism was envisaged as the only practicable alternative to a manifestly oppressive capitalism.

The option for the poor is not absent from "First World" theology.<sup>17</sup> Naturally, however, the option has been most forcefully articulated from the "Third World". In explaining its adoption by the Church in Brazil, Cardinal Paulo Arns of Sao Paulo conveys much of the distinctive tone of liberation theology itself:

We are not a church of geniuses who suddenly decided to opt for the poor - the option came from pure necessity: 85% of our population is oppressed and its oppression clearly showed us that we live in a social and economic situation of injustice. . . .

The first rights of the poor that we defended can be called liberal rights: Habeas Corpus, defence against torture, imprisonment for years without trial. In this struggle many worked together with the church.

In the struggle for political rights - elections, the right of criticism in Congress, etc. - many others struggled with us and even praised us.

But when it came to the rights that only affect the poor - strikes, agrarian reform, humanizing slums, etc. - with rare exceptions, only the poor remained united in this struggle.

. . . . The defence of the poor is a threat to the whole system which reacts with all the virulence of its being (Arns, 1981).

As Arns goes on to explain, "the option for the poor is not a class option in the marxist sense of the word. The Gospel is indeed universal, but the powerful will only see the newness of the word of God through the eyes of the poor and through the rejection of profit as the centre and the only absolute of social organization". The "determinate negation" here flows from a prior affirmation of those whose dignity is negated.

8. Effective recognition of such human dignity requires what Metz calls a "political theology of the subject" (1980: 60). The word "subject" does not here refer to "the isolated individual, the monad who only afterwards made sure of his co-existence with other subjects". But "the idea of truth without reference to subjects is irrelevant and even dangerous, with the result that truth and relevance are bound to converge to the extent that truth becomes the type of relevance that applies to all subjects" (*Ibid*: 62, 60). Elsewhere Metz goes further: the very function of religion is rooted in subjectivity:

If we are to achieve a postbourgeois and post-individualist "rescue of the human subject", religion seems to me indispensable. Without religion, I see the barbarism of a blind negation of the individual breaking out within a postbourgeois society (1981: 70).

Metz therefore holds that solidarity is not to be at the expense of individuation; he does not spurn the language of "conversion of heart"; and he writes, "even the poorest and most damaged individual remains higher in value

than any total determination of societal and economic reality" (*Ibid*: 71, 74). Likewise, Sölle's *Death by Bread Alone* is entirely concerned with the search for authentic interiority, the meditative experience of the divine, and the experiences of grace and personal identity.

Sölle also avers that subjective consciousness is the primary locus of social change:

If someone asks, How does one become a Christian for socialism?, I would reply: love your neighbour and pay attention to your own experience. . . . The more you become involved with your neighbour, the more you must care about his world, his life . . . his social environment. Then you want to understand the causes of your neighbour's misery, and to bring about changes. The person who is basically compassionate gets to the roots of the problem and is radicalized (Sölle, 1976: 424).

Among liberation theologians, Segundo Galilea (1974: 19-33) uses the notion of "encounter" to argue that contemplation and politics are mutually constitutive: as a consequence of the Incarnation, the Christian encounters Christ in other people and other people in Christ. Gutiérrez, speaking of the "encounter with God in history" reiterates the traditional conception that every person is a "temple of the Holy Spirit" (1973: 192-93). Segundo (1977: 208-40) contrasts minority consciousness and mass consciousness, not in order to posit two discrete groups of people, of which one group, the mass, is of minimal significance, but to emphasize that "conscientization", like the gospel message itself, aims to nourish "the minority character in each and every human being" (*Ibid*: 231).

Again Fierro takes a contrary stance (1977: 233-36), though he seems careful to preserve an element of ambiguity, perhaps even of deliberate confusion. He argues that "stress on individual conversion has ever been an obstacle to social change". His first explanation of this sentence is modest: self-conversion "is not

independent of the surrounding social system", but is "conditioned" by the milieu; the gospel summons to conversion not only on the individual but also on the political and social level; we must scrape from the notion of conversion "the barnacles of excessive individualism". But he goes on to make a far more intransigent deduction:

when gospel conversion ceases to be interpreted as a process centred on the individual and comes to be understood as a process centred around groups and collectivities, then it ends up corresponding to what is otherwise known as liberating revolution. "Conversion" is the Christian name for revolution.

What he means by "revolution" quickly becomes clear: "in the last analysis, societal transformation comes down to a transformation of production relationships". He asks, "Which comes first, the new person or the new society?", and answers the question with a surprising confidence which nevertheless remains slightly evasive:

the older moralism naively believed that the conversion of human individuals would be enough. . . . [but] current theology knows that there can be no transformation of human beings without a transformation of society. . . . Real conversion to a new humanity must necessarily go by way of revolution. Revolution will not automatically produce new human beings, but it is the necessary social precondition for that on the collective level.

Fierro stops just short of claiming that the transformation of production relationships guarantees the conversion of individuals. But he has no doubt that it has a wholly causal relationship with that conversion. His view of the relationship between "infrastructure" and "superstructure" is that of unqualified historical materialism, and renders subjectivity virtually inconsequential.

9. Political theology concerns itself with the present less as the fruit of the past than as the foundation of the future, the present as it is oriented (or not) to the eschatological Kingdom of God (Lamb, 1978: 41-42). A

"palaeomorphic" or a "fideomorphic" theology, correctly stressing that human effort cannot directly construct the Kingdom (because the Kingdom depends on the divine gift), will tend to distance itself from any programmes which seek social transformation within history. Political theology, recognizing their provisionality, nevertheless takes them seriously. Lamb therefore suggests that "the eschatological orientation of religious praxis is a dialectical unity of identity and non-identity with the concrete social praxis of secular and ecclesial communities and institutions" (*Ibid*: 44).

Metz commonly invokes the "eschatological proviso" in this connection (e.g. 1968: 114). This

does not bring about a negative but a critical attitude to the societal present. Its promises are not an empty horizon of religious expectations; neither are they only a regulative idea. They are, rather, a critical liberating imperative for our present times (*Ibid*).

To link the concepts of the eschaton and the future, therefore, is not to deny that the eschatological rule of God is also a *present* reality, though a "disputed and hidden" one, subject to resistance: for the eschaton has already begun, and its power determines the present (Moltmann, 1977: 190, 192). By uniting the two concepts one rules out any conception of the Kingdom of God which minimizes the significance of history, but also implies that human creativity or achievement is itself a sign of a further, more profound reality.

The problematic of a "theology of hope", as set out clearly by Fierro, lies in the *relationship* between the historical and the eschatological:

we might maintain that the Christian hopes for the same thing that other human beings hope for: i.e., a more humane society; the only distinctive element in the Christian hope is that it regards a more human society as a promise and gift from God. Or, on the other hand, we might claim that the Christian hopes for something in addition to that hoped for by other

human beings: i.e., for a kingdom of God that is to be realized in a future that will transcend history and this world (1977: 298).

This position, though clearly set out, is scarcely persuasive: what Fierro calls a "dilemma" assumes that the "basic alternatives" are mutually exclusive. But the two modes of hope can be understood as compatible with each other, even as essentially inter-related. More important still, Fierro represents Christian hope positivistically, as if it were directed at a "thing" out there (perhaps some desirable set of circumstances), a thing either different from or identical with the thing perceived by others. His language excludes the possibility that Christian hope is structured by a deeper perception into the ~~same~~ "things".

Most political theology here builds on an insight of Teilhard de Chardin which directly rejects the dichotomy posited by Fierro. Teilhard fears that the Christian might "repress his taste for the tangible and force himself to confine his concern to purely religious objects". As he argues, one familiar counsel, that the value of human action lies in the intention put into it, is only partially true: the intention "puts a priceless *soul* into all our actions" but "*does not confer the hope of resurrection upon their bodies*" (1964: 52-55, 62-63, emphasis in original).

As Moltmann explains, if history is an "open system", then only the transcendent kingdom gives a decisive orientation to the transformative possibilities which are immanent in history: conversely, for those without a commitment to historical transformation, any dream of the transcendent kingdom is a mere mode of escape: "the doxological anticipation of the beauty of the kingdom and active resistance to godless and inhuman relationships in history" are mutually reinforcing (Moltmann, 1977: 190).

"Anticipations" of the Kingdom are concrete, but are also consciously preliminary: "they represent what is to come and not themselves", and they preclude both complacency and any attitude of resignation which settles for the partial truth that "the world is unredeemed and everything is still ambivalent" (*Ibid*: 193-95).<sup>19</sup>

10. Political theology is practical; it "engages in praxis".<sup>20</sup> As to the relationship between theory and praxis, two different emphases are discernible. One emphasis goes back to the Hellenic philosophers. For Aristotle, *praxis*, as opposed to both *theoria* and *poiesis* (technical skill), inherently serves ethical action: for St. Thomas Aquinas, following Aristotle, theoretical and practical knowledge, though they can converge, differ in their intentionality, the latter being ordered to ethics, politics, and so on (Post, 1970: 246-47). From this perspective, political theology is validated only in right action, in "practice that is truly directed towards building up the community" (Lakeland, 1984: 13). Thus Moltmann, having worked out his theology of the cross, then asks, "What are the economic, social and political consequences of the gospel of the Son of man who was crucified as a 'rebel'? . . . . The freedom of faith is lived out in political freedom. [It] urges men on towards liberating actions . . . ." (1974: 317).<sup>20</sup>

But when Gutiérrez describes his own mode of doing theology as "critical reflection on praxis" (1973: 6), he represents praxis as the foundation of theory, not only its goal. According to Segundo, the liberation theologian starts from the suspicion that all existing ideas, including theology, are "intimately bound up with the existing social situation in at least an unconscious way" (1977: 8). Existing ideas are, therefore, a shaky foundation on which to construct theory.<sup>21</sup> Thus Fiorenza (1977: 169-70) finds that whereas the German theologians

typically move from theory to praxis, the liberation theologians move from praxis to theory.<sup>22</sup>

However, this difference of emphasis is not an opposition. That both schools acknowledge the dialectical interplay between praxis and theory, is manifest, for example, in Segundo's account of the hermeneutical circle (1977: 9-38), and in Metz's description of theology as a "second reflection", undertaken in specific social conditions (1969: 111). Gutiérrez writes, "What Hegel used to say about philosophy can likewise be applied to theology: it rises only at sundown" (1973: 11). But, as Verkamp observes, (1988: 16), such reflection after sundown, if it is not mere musing, must inform the next day's activity, and therefore implies that theory intermittently guides practice. Segundo, too, acknowledges that if ideas are not innocent, neither are interests (e.g. 1977: 98-106). "Commitment" is no more self-validating than is theory. To put the same point in a more positive way, commitments and interests are not inherently mindless or impermeable to truth, nor is theory inherently blind to its own conditions.<sup>23</sup>

Political theologians also differ in their account of the scope of praxis itself. Fierro (1977: 20-23) uses the term uncompromisingly, to denote action aimed at the transformation of society, deriving it from Marx's famous eleventh thesis against Feuerbach. As Fierro renders that thesis, "Philosophers have done nothing more than *interpret* the world in different ways; but it is really a matter of *transforming* it". One might add the eighth thesis, "All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice" (Marx, 1977: 157). As Fierro writes, belief is "no longer identified with a way of thinking but with a way of acting", and "present-day theology has decided to be active and transforming in the



practical realm. It means to be a theology with hands as well as with eyes" (*Ibid*).

But though Fierro cites Metz as one who approves of theology's shift to praxis, Metz gives the term a much broader application. He refers to critical discourse, for example, as itself praxis (1969: 122-24), which implies that interpreting the world does *not* leave it unchanged, and that "ways of thinking" ought not to be polarized with "ways of acting". Metz later deepened his reflections on this theme, speaking of "the dangerous memory of the freedom of Jesus Christ". Such a memory "regards history as something more than a screen for contemporary interests". It "mobilises tradition as a dangerous tradition", which inherently challenges the "prevailing consciousness" (1980: 88, 90). Similarly, praxis includes joy and sorrow (because they renounce the "prevalent apathy of society"); and it includes solidarity with the past suffering of those who have been overcome. For "every rebellion against suffering is fed by the subversive power of remembered suffering. The memory of suffering continues to resist the cynics of modern political power". Metz's expansion of the concept rescues praxis from presupposing a one-sided anthropology according to which human beings simply exert control over nature and history (*Ibid*: 57-58, 110). It also follows from Metz's description that praxis includes the critique of unduly narrow notions of praxis!<sup>24</sup>

At the other pole to Fierro stand Lonergan and Fiorenza. Lonergan adopts the Aristotelian usage by which the products of *poiesis* pass beyond the maker's control to be used at the will of others, whereas *praxis* is the "doing" which always results from one's own deliberation guided by practical wisdom. Theology as such is "basically a praxis", by which is meant that the most fundamental questions in theology "are resolved far less by objective rules than by existential decisions"

(1977: 1, 14, 10). For Lonergan as against Fierro, then, praxis is constituted by the intrinsic character of an action or decision, not by the goal which is sought by it. Fiorenza speaks of "the total praxis (intellectual as well as imaginative, symbolic as well as conceptual, individual as well as social) of religious conversion and flowing from religious conversion" (1977: 143). Far from praxis's defining what counts as conversion, any conversion constitutes praxis.

Sölle likewise insists that praxis must not be abandoned to "instrumental reason"; that is, to action in the service of a particular predetermined nexus of ends and means (1974: 77-81). Echoing, but refining Segundo's notion of "suspicion", Clodovis Boff argues similarly (1987: 14-17, 186-93): theology, including political theology, cannot be merely the "voice of praxis", cannot be empirically derived from praxis or pragmatically oriented to it. It has an internal autonomy. But at a *different level* all theorizing, like any other activity, takes its place in the flux of historical and social purposes, and cannot be independent of them.<sup>25</sup>

Terry Eagleton writes,

It is not just as though we have something called factual knowledge which may then be distorted by particular interests and judgments, although this is certainly possible; it is also that without particular interests we would have no knowledge at all, because we would not see the point of bothering to get to know anything. Interests are *constitutive* of our knowledge, not merely prejudices which imperil it (Eagleton, 1983: 14).

This point is well taken. However, even if interests are constitutive of knowledge, it remains possible that knowledge will transcend the interests that give rise to it. And, in the context of a discussion of "praxis", a second point is especially important. In Eagleton's formulation two meanings of the word "interest" might easily but misleadingly be elided: that of the various

external factors which undoubtedly influence one's thought (and perhaps even exert a pressure which approaches "hegemony"), and that of an innate orientation which endows one's thinking with vitality as well as direction. It is possible that one can become relatively emancipated from "vested interests" even as one becomes more effectively impelled by some innate drive towards knowledge.

As will be seen in Chapter Two, Voegelin draws on classical philosophy to postulate of human beings an inherent orientation to a transcendent Truth which exercises an erotic attraction on consciousness. In other words, "Truth" itself is an "interest", which precisely impels one to "disinterestedness". In its relationship to truth, consciousness is marked by both intentionality and participation, by activity and receptivity. Particular interests, of either of the two types just mentioned, guide the search for knowledge without necessarily constraining it. Once gained, knowledge might either confirm or threaten one's previous interests. There is, therefore, an inherent tension but no necessary incompatibility between the disinterestedness of a theoretical discipline and the interests which motivate its practitioners: and in this respect Voegelin offers a theory of consciousness which is richer and more subtle than that implied by Eagleton and Fierro.

#### The Purpose of the Study

Voegelin regarded himself as a philosopher, not as a theologian. Since he was persistently single-minded in pursuing his scholarly goals, he considered it no part of his task to engage in dialogue with theologians on their terms.<sup>26</sup> Conversely, among the political theologians considered in the previous section, only Matthew Lamb has discussed Voegelin at any length. It therefore seems necessary to explain briefly why the focus of this thesis

is not arbitrary. The twofold explanation is rooted, firstly, in certain difficulties internal to political theology itself, difficulties on which a study of Voegelin casts light: and secondly, in the contention that Voegelin's work is flawed in a way that is highlighted by the insights of political theology but is likely to be overlooked by those who do not take such theology seriously.

Accordingly, Part One of the thesis will offer an exposition of Voegelin's empirically wide-ranging, but theoretically consistent work, with the concerns of political theology as the main principle behind the selection of topics. Part Two will discuss three themes which lie close to the heart both of Voegelin's philosophy and of political theology. Voegelin's treatment of these themes will be considered in order to explore both his potential contribution to the discipline and his deficiencies in the light of it. The three themes are:

- (1) the relationship between consciousness and social structures, between personal and societal transformation;
- (2) the relationship between hope for societal transformation within history and eschatological hope;
- (3) the theoretician's discharge of political responsibility.<sup>27</sup>

In the remainder of this section, we shall introduce these themes: first from the standpoint of political theology, and then from that of Voegelin's own work.

#### *Voegelin's Potential Contribution to Political Theology*

1. Perhaps the most powerful articulations of political theology have emerged from the experience of a brutal and dramatically manifest social injustice: "Liberation

theology was, and is, the creative, authentic attempt to give a genuinely Christian answer to this situation of real suffering" (Greinacher, 1986: 81). But the very source of the prophetic power of such theology gives rise to a theoretical problem.

We have noticed the insistence of liberation theologians that they cannot simply take over the findings of European theology. There are crucial differences in religious culture as well as in specifically political or economic circumstances. It follows that the exporting of liberation theology is no less problematic.

For example, there are three reasons why liberation theologians can assert legitimately that a politically-oriented theology deserves a privileged status. Firstly, there is the social context of political injustices and abuses so pervasive and so stark as to threaten the very life of anyone who challenges them. Secondly, since such bodies as trades unions and co-operatives are virtually crushed lest they offer effective resistance to the ruling powers, church groups emerge as potentially the most effective focus for mutual support and social protest. Thirdly, and no less important, liberation theologians can reasonably rely on the persistence of a rich communal faith (for example, in the "Basic Christian Communities"): hence their slight concern with "European" problems of secularization.<sup>20</sup>

It seems plausible to suggest that such communities' experience of profound, shared suffering, intrinsic social relevance, and vigorous faith (experience which is, in the narrow sense, "non-political") is the very condition of liberation theology's political witness.

Therefore, the claim that "everything is political" is sustainable only as long as it is *known by experience* to be non-exclusive. It has the valid sense that no area of

one's life is separable from the political reality which is its context and its formative condition. But it becomes false if it implicitly denies the parallel statements that "everything is spiritual" or "everything is psychological". The members of a Latin American base community, united in a shared life of scriptural reflection and sacramental participation, may be relatively immune from such a mistake. To apply the findings of the liberation theologians in the absence of such an integrated experience will betray their own intentions. If, therefore, one acknowledges the spiritual disintegration of Europe diagnosed by such writers as Metz and Sölle, it follows that any European version of a liberation theology will require a complementary "non-political" renewal of spiritual awareness; and that it might well be self-defeating to reproduce liberation theology's particularity of focus in the secularized European context.<sup>29</sup>

A due awareness that theological perspectives and tasks vary by no means implies that Europe can comfortably seal itself off from the challenge of liberation theology. For the twentieth century has also seen the growth of a new sense of human unity. As Rahner notes, whereas once, say, the siege of Vienna was "of no real immediate moment for the history of South East Asia",

there is a centripetal force at work in humanity today, driving individual cultures and historical spaces together . . . into a single, common existential space for all human beings (1983: 77).

Thus, in so far as European Christians account themselves members of one body with those suffering in the "Third World", they can (and must) seek to share something of the experience of suffering: obviously imperfectly, but sufficiently to share their aspirations for liberation.<sup>30</sup> They can recognize, too, that Europe is united with, say, Latin America, by the nexus of commercial exploitation, and can accept the consequences of that recognition for the practice of their faith and their politics.<sup>31</sup>

Now the reasons why some people and not others are open to such an insight lies not in the economic data themselves, but in *consciousness*. To put this point in another way, political discourse, like spiritual and psychological discourse, is a way of structuring and articulating one's experience of the world. There can be no rule of thumb to prescribe which mode of discourse is most appropriate at a given time, and no externally objective state of affairs compels a uniform human response to it. Any account of the human situation which, like Fierro's, entails the view that consciousness (or "conversion") is minimally significant, cuts away the grounding of praxis itself, by diminishing people's awareness of both their *freedom* to respond and the significance of their response.

If Fierro were right in this, then Voegelin's work would be of no interest. Those political theologians who do affirm the role of the subject, however, will be much helped by anyone who can give an adequate account of the *relationship* between subjective, personal, transformation and societal transformation. It is reasonable to look to Voegelin, as a political philosopher, for such help.<sup>32</sup>

2. Czeslaw Milosz has written,

Even a theologically trained Christian must puzzle over the Gospel references to the future Kingdom of God. . . . The Gospels have been invoked both by millenarists of every persuasion and by pessimistically inclined Christians, for whom the earth will always be a valley of tears (Milosz, 1985: 181).

We have already cited Moltmann's suggestion that anticipations of the Kingdom in history are genuine, though preliminary and provisional. He deduces that "hope becomes realistic and reality hopeful" (1977: 192). In his earlier *Theology of Hope*, he postulates hope as the median virtue between the two vices of presumption

(the impatient demand for the present fulfilment of hope) and despair (the premature and arbitrary anticipation of its non-fulfilment). Against Pascal's dictum "we never live, but we hope to live; and as we are always preparing to be happy, it is inevitable we should never be so"; Moltmann insists that living without hope is "like no longer living", and that hope "is itself the happiness of the present" (1967: 23, 27, 32).

Moltmann, to be sure, never overlooks the persistence of suffering and conflict in history. As he testifies, "Since I first studied theology, I have been concerned with the theology of the cross" (1974: 1). However, he also writes,

Hope alone is to be called "realistic" because it alone takes seriously the possibilities with which all reality is fraught. It does not take things as they happen to stand or to lie, but as progressing, moving things with possibilities of change. Hope and the kind of thinking that goes with it consequently cannot submit to the reproach of being utopian, for they do not strive after things that have "no place", but after things that have "no place as yet" but can acquire one (1967: 25).

These sentences embody the remarkable assumption that change means growth. They "take seriously" only *some* of the possibilities with which reality is fraught. Since decline and regression are at all times no less possible than progress, it would be more accurate to assert that hope, but not "hope alone" is "realistic"; that realism allows, but does not entail hope. It is true, as Moltmann aptly notes, that "meaningful action is always possible only within a horizon of expectation. otherwise all decisions and actions would be desperate thrusts into a void and would hang unintelligibly and meaninglessly in the air" (1967: 326-27). But expectation can have the character of fear as well as of hope: and defensive (or even "desperate") action inspired by fearful expectation is "meaningful".



There are three types of challenge, all formidable, to the suggestion that only hope is realistic.

Firstly and most dramatically, among the most vivid contemporary "anticipations" are those of catastrophe; economic, ecological, nuclear. As a literary genre, dystopia is as common as utopia. It may be true that a person filled with hope acquires resilience sufficient to meet grim circumstances with courage, and even with joy. But foreboding is no less sane than hope, and is not inherently a sin against hope.<sup>33</sup>

Secondly, according to Henri Bergson progress can be defined only in retrospect. The achievement of social progress can only be posited of a society "such that, if men once tried it, they would refuse to go back to the old state of things" (1935: 80). The example with which Bergson illustrates his subtle argument (1935: 78-81) concerns the inter-relationship between equality and liberty. As values they are necessarily in tension, but they are *opposed* to each other only as long as they are conceived as mechanistic forces. For a society to grow in its capacity to reconcile the two values there is required an enhanced quality of moral perception. And if we could envisage such moral advances, we should already have attained them! They are by definition unforeseeable. If Bergson is correct, Moltmann is incautious in linking the rhetoric of hope with that of progress.<sup>34</sup>

The third challenge to Moltmann's assertion derives from the argument which Freud set out most clearly in *Civilization and its Discontents* and *The Future of an Illusion*. "Happiness, in the reduced sense in which we recognize it as possible, is a problem of the economics of the individual's libido" (Freud, 1985: 271). In other words, happiness is a function of the capacity by which a person balances the search for pleasure against the avoidance of pain. According to Freud, whereas religion

destructively restricts the scope of such adaptation by imposing on all its adherents one path to happiness, civilization defends the psyche against threat only at the cost of systematically frustrating the libido: thus, "there are difficulties attaching to the nature of civilization which will not yield to any attempt at reform" (*Ibid*: 306). Freud therefore considers happiness to be unattainable. Instead of the search for it he advocates an "education to reality", by which infantilism is renounced and the full extent of human "helplessness" and "insignificance" accepted (*Ibid*: 233).<sup>35</sup>

The difficulty which faces a political theology of hope may be expressed in another way: not on grounds of external threat or psychological theory, but on the grounds of the intrinsic character of the future as such. Metz distinguishes "our" future from "God's" future:

God is not "above us" but "before us". His transcendence reveals itself as our "absolute future". This future is . . . . not erected out of the potentialities of our human freedom and human action. Rather, this future calls forth our potentialities to unfold themselves in history. Only such a future - one that is more than just the projections of our abilities - can call us to realize truly new possibilities (Metz, 1969: 88-89).

Now, political theology seems obliged to connect "hope" with the removal of historically manifest social injustices. But in so far as such a result is aimed at, no matter how humbly, it seems to belong to "our" future not to "God's". And in terms of the spiritual insight of Buddhism, for example, the very will to remove suffering embodies the craving which ensures the reproduction of suffering (Carrithers, 1983: 60-66).

Perhaps with this anomaly in mind, Metz goes on to distinguish between the terms "future" (a reality grounded in itself, which comes to us as God's gift) and "goal" (which "appears exclusively as the correlate of

the present", and which people (or, at least, powerful people) falsely imagine to be within their control) (Ibid: 98-99).<sup>36</sup> Moltmann (1985: 132-35) similarly distinguishes between terms which signify *becoming*, a more or less predictable extrapolation from the present (Latin *futurum*, French *futur*), and terms which signify what is *coming* from the future as something qualitatively new (Latin *adventus*, French *avenir*). English and German have each a single term only, with contrasting etymologies (i.e. *Zukunft* is cognate to *adventus*).

Such distinctions, however, fail to extricate Metz or Moltmann from the difficulty they see so clearly. When we symbolize the eschatological Kingdom we extrapolate from our present experience in a twofold manner: the Kingdom will not only fulfil our experience of good but will also provide a "rectifying alternative" to our experience of historical evil (Keck, 1972: 222). Even what Metz calls "future" (the historical state which approaches us as God's gift rather than as the function of the human capacity to control events) will necessarily be present under the conditions of material finitude and human sinfulness; it will have its own propensity to decay. One cannot use such distinctions to espouse a form of historical optimism, and one cannot imagine that the "future" and the "absolute future" form a continuum. The Kingdom will overturn history - including "God's historical *adventus*" - as well as crown it.

Metz is well aware of the poignancy of this dilemma; As he writes, "If 'progress' exists at all, it is only in opposition to its naïve generalization" (1980: 100). The history of freedom is itself a history of guilt, and requires a consciously held soteriology if it is not to engage in "an irrational mechanism of exoneration or guilt-repression" (Ibid: 127).

The problematic will be clear. In so far as an appeal to the "possibilities latent in the present" grounds an implicitly generalized exhortation to "transform social structures", political theology threatens to disallow (as "mystifications") such attitudes as "detachment" and "patience". And yet these spiritual qualities will be required by mature individuals in any conceivable historical situation. Political theology cannot dissolve Milosz's "puzzle". And therefore one has to posit an authentic Christian hope (in other words, not merely "consolation") which can survive the erosion of historical optimism.

3. According to Lamb, political theology "mediates faith dialectically, emphasizing how it transforms human action". He contrasts the character of such a theology with the perspective of certain other thinkers (among them Voegelin), who tend to emphasize the disclosive character of religious truth. "Such an approach, no matter how sophisticated, minimizes the transformative effect of religious and doctrinal symbols on human experience" (1979: 81-83). If, however, one guards against an exclusively activist interpretation of praxis, as does Metz in allowing that it has a "pathic" as well as an active dimension, then it becomes dubious to oppose Voegelin to praxis-theologians simply on the ground that he favours a "disclosure" model of truth. Disclosures have their roots in *experience*, whether individual or communal: both the experience and the disclosure it evokes have a social context and social implications.<sup>27</sup>

Contrasting Voegelin with the political theologians, Lamb suggests that in Voegelin's thought transcendence is disclosed as a "dimension or structure *already present* implicitly or explicitly in human experience" (*Ibid*: 83, author's emphasis). In political theology, however, transcendence is "not disclosed as already present" but is experienced as an "imperative challenge capable of

transforming or converting the present unfreedom of human existence" (*Ibid*).

We shall shortly see that Lamb's criticism of Voegelin is not without weight. In opposing disclosure to praxis, however, Lamb misleadingly represents the event of disclosure itself as somehow serene, divorced from any sense of crisis. On the contrary, as has already been said, Voegelin holds that philosophy is intrinsically a resistance to social disorder. For those whose intellectual activity leaves the status quo unchallenged, he recovers the Platonic term "philodoxers", who are specifically contrasted with true "philosophers".<sup>30</sup> The key disclosures of Voegelin's own life occurred precisely *through* crises, whether intellectual or civilizational. It seems, in fact, that no one floats downstream to a new vision.<sup>31</sup>

I cite Lamb's criticism at this point because it also unwittingly points to an impasse for a praxis-oriented theology itself: namely, that when it is stressed exclusively, it cuts itself off from its own sources of nourishment. There are two aspects to this impasse.

Firstly, Lamb's polarization represents praxis as determining the very relevance of the transcendent. But if the transcendent cannot on principle be experienced immediately, it is unlikely to be experienced as the ground of a social struggle either. Secondly, to posit an opposition (and not merely a distinction which allows for complementarity) between a Voegelinian "disclosive" theology and political theology may well itself be socially destructive, by judging the whole of reality according to the single criterion of usefulness for a previously settled purpose. Worship will be evaluated in terms entirely of its social function, community dissolved into alliances, the notion of leisure thinned out to that of recuperation for further work. Such an

instrumentalist mentality must impoverish the psyche, even should the goal sought be as magnanimous as the enhancement of human freedom.<sup>40</sup>

At this point, the problematic of praxis overlaps with those of hope and of subjectivity. Political theology is keenly and correctly alert to the danger that such spiritual dispositions as detachment, patience, and contemplation will renounce human responsibility for the world. But to the extent that aggressively intervening in situations can sometimes worsen them, granted the bitter knowledge that supposed solutions can entail unforeseen and destructive side-effects, "non-action" can also express political responsibility.<sup>41</sup>

It is an inadequate reply to this point to say that praxis has its own "theoretical moment", that it demands analysed action and not mere blundering: for praxis tends to utilize "analysis" only to refine its strategies, not to question its ideological ends.<sup>42</sup>

In 1986, Charles Davis argued for a shift in emphasis by which social action, rather than "inwardness" should be regarded as the "privileged locus" for religious experience" (1986: 115). His argument was directed against the identification of religious experience with interiority, from which it would follow that social and political action are at best regarded as legitimate consequences of a prior spirituality.<sup>43</sup> But in 1973, Davis had recorded the stronger claim, which he regarded as a "serious challenge to theology as currently understood", that "truth does not yet exist; it cannot be reached by interpretation, but it has to be produced by change". He added his own view:

The praxis of christians, like all praxis, demands a critical analysis of present society, intended to uncover the contradictions latent within it. These contradictions, if Christianity is more than ideology, will occur where Christians with their faith

and hope are situated in an objective conflict with the social order. Conscious Christian praxis is the actualization of the conflict thus uncovered (Davis, 1973: 166, 167).

This position seems to be incoherent. If truth does not yet exist *at all*, what status has one's exposure of societal "contradictions"? Can light "fall on" the struggle (which would suppose some source of disclosure), or does it only "flow from" the struggle? If the latter, what first inspires *anyone's* struggle? What, in any case, is "the social order"? If it extends into one's psyche (which has its own divisions), how can one simply be in "objective conflict" with the social order?

Secondly, unless Davis recognized that "Christian life" transcends the boundaries of "Christian praxis", his position would be viciously restrictive. No action that failed directly to contest "the social order" (such as feeding one's baby, doing a humdrum job honestly, suffering an illness patiently) could express faith. In fact, in 1980, Davis did come close to denying any such transcendence:

Christian faith is grounded when emancipatory social action brings us to the limits of human meaning, so that we experience in Christ a transcendent source of hope and liberation (1980: 6).

Granted that human beings are social beings, does it not follow that all human action is by definition "social action"? If so, "emancipatory social action" simply means actions which in some way, manifest or intangible, support others. Perhaps any action that expresses truth not falsehood, acceptance of others not hostility to them, challenges the "social order" by refusing to collude in it. If, however, "emancipatory social action" is for Davis synonymous with "praxis", he here dismisses all Christian faith that is not *consciously* directed to a single end, and posits not a "privileged locus" for religious experience, but an exclusive one.<sup>44</sup>

It is consistent to argue that Christian theology needs to learn from praxis theory to recognize its own latent political function, while also recognizing that other criteria than political responsibility may appropriately govern human decisions. But praxis theory cannot itself embody the criteria to determine whether it is more appropriately applicable to a given situation than contrasting insights and modes of discourse.<sup>45</sup>

To sum up: if "the subject" and subjective experience are affirmed they must necessarily be affirmed even when their social relevance is obscure. Otherwise, in the name of praxis one embraces a tyrannous brand of epistemological positivism. Against that, Voegelin's thought is an effective prophylactic.<sup>46</sup>

#### *Voegelin in the Light of Political Theology*

This study will also argue that the perspectives of political theology offer a necessary corrective to Voegelin's work: more strongly, that political theology is a vantage point from which certain deficiencies of his thought can be brought into focus. The same three themes may be reiterated from the reverse perspective, though very briefly, since their substance has already been indicated.

1. At the heart of Voegelin's work is the insistence that symbolic and propositional discourse are authentic only in so far as they are rooted in and continuously fed by the experiences that engendered the discourse. Since political theology focuses on the experiences of those who suffer from or those who oppose social injustice, its natural tendency to extraversion may entail the lack of an adequate account of consciousness. I shall suggest that the limitation of Voegelin's thought lies not in its adherence to a "disclosure model of truth" as such (as



Lamb suggests), but in the restricted class of experiences he regards as authentic sources of disclosure. For him these sources are experiences of transcendent reality by the meditating consciousness, but scarcely experiences of communal solidarity or struggle. On his account, ultimate reality is disclosed to the solitary searcher who experiences the direct attraction of transcendent being and responds to that attraction with an "open soul". Is it not equally true that ultimate reality can be disclosed as the "depth dimension" of faithful action - both the actions we commit ourselves to and the actions of others from which we benefit? Does the Judaeo-Christian tradition properly lay more emphasis on the communal and practical dimensions of faith than Voegelin attributes to it?

2. A particular hope underlies Voegelin's work: that a renewed openness to the truth of reality will bring about freedom from ideologies. By clarifying the nature of those deformations of consciousness which make political movements destructive, the authentic philosopher is to be a force for political good. As will be seen, he holds the most devastating ideologies to be those which pretend that the evils inherent in historical existence can be dispelled. In his view, humanity's most profound hope is to be directed beyond history. The question arises whether his position implies that the particular concrete goods which can be accomplished by temporal action are virtually discounted merely because they are not irreversible. We shall enquire whether Voegelin diminishes the scope of legitimate Christian hope for the transformation of the world *within* history, so introducing a dichotomy between historical and eschatological hope.

3. Voegelin has cited as his model of the philosopher's discharge of political responsibility Plato's strategy of withdrawing from the corrupt Athenian government in order to form an ideal alternative community, whose wisdom

could then be brought to bear on the political order. But the notion of "praxis", even in <sup>its</sup> more open form, embodies a claim that political wisdom *cannot even be acquired* apart from a commitment to just and responsible action in the present, and that it is radically misleading to envisage a sequence by which one first becomes "wise" and is then able to act authentically. It will therefore be necessary to consider the potential of Voegelin's philosophy to nourish responsible participation in political life, as well as his critique of those ideologies which consecrate political irresponsibility.

If it were to turn out that Voegelin's work at once depreciated the communal dimension of human existence, removed effective hope to a realm outside the temporal order, and diminished the scope of Christian responsibility for the world, we should have to speak of him, an arch-critic of ideologies, as himself an unwitting servant of those particular ideologies of conservatism which, as we shall see, he explicitly and cogently criticizes: one who, in enunciating a set of insights, however valuable, impedes the recognition of other urgent truths and obstructs those who engage in a "struggle" quite as intrinsic to Christian existence as his own struggle for understanding. Voegelin might still have much to offer political theology, but he would also stand to be judged by it.

CHAPTER TWO  
HUMAN EXISTENCE IN THE METAXY

Metaxic Reality

It would be a travesty of Voegelin's whole method to interpret him as positing certain "ideas" or "theories" which might then be "applied" to a range of empirical data and serve as a key to interpretation. But certain principles consistently inform his analysis. These are not simply axioms, because he explicitly argues for them; in the theoretical introduction to *The World of the Polis*, he describes them as "the principles which . . . furnish the critical foundation for *Order and History*" (OH II: 7). The most fundamental among these principles is that human existence is lived in the *metaxy* or the *In-Between*, a term he takes from Plato, who in turn derives it from Anaximander (fl. 560 B.C.). Voegelin writes,

Reality was experienced by Anaximander as a cosmic process in which things emerge from, and disappear into, the non-existence of the *Apeiron* [the Boundless]. Things do not exist out of themselves, all at once and forever; they exist out of the ground to which they return. Hence, to exist means to participate in two modes of reality: (1) in the *Apeiron* as the timeless *arche* of things and (2) in the ordered succession of things as the manifestation of the *Apeiron* in time (OH IV: 174).

To express the same experience of reality, Plato has developed the symbol of the *metaxy*, of the in-between, in the sense of a reality that partakes of both time and eternity and, therefore, does not wholly belong to the one or the other. There appears to be a flow of existence that is not existence in time (Voegelin, 1967a: 261-62).

These statements, explains Voegelin, are not to be regarded as "absolute" truths. They constitute a *field*

*of consciousness*, in which there is first an insight into the mystery and structure of the process, and, second, a reflexive recognition that through that very insight one's participation in reality is brought to awareness.'

Voegelin gives his most lucid account of the metaxy in an essay of 1970, "Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History". A lengthy quotation, which will then be explicated, cannot be avoided, since it articulates the foundation of Voegelin's entire work:

Existence has the structure of the In-Between, of the Platonic *Metaxy*, and if anything is constant in the history of mankind it is the language of tension between life and death, immortality and mortality, perfection and imperfection, time and timelessness; between order and disorder, truth and untruth, sense and senselessness of existence; between *amor Dei* and *amor sui*, *l'âme ouverte* and *l'âme close*; between the virtues of openness toward the ground of being such as faith, love, and hope, and the vices of infolding closure such as *hybris* and revolt; between the moods of joy and despair; and between alienation in its double meaning of alienation from the world and alienation from God. If we split these pairs of symbols, and hypostatize the poles of the tension as independent entities, we destroy the reality of existence as it has been experienced by the creators of the tensional symbolisms; . . . Ultimate doctrines, systems, and values are phantasmata engendered by deformed existence. What is constant in the history of mankind, i.e. in the time dimension of existence, is the structure of existence itself; and regarding this constant structure certain propositions can indeed be advanced. There is, first of all, the fundamental proposition:

1) Man participates in the process of reality.

The implications of the fundamental proposition, then, can be expressed by the following propositions:

2). Man is conscious of reality as a process, of himself as being part of reality, and of his consciousness as a mode of participation in its process.

3) While constantly participating, man is able to engender symbols which express his experience of reality, of himself as the experiencing agent, and

of his conscious experiencing as the action and passion of participating.

4) Man knows the symbols engendered to be part of the reality they symbolize - the symbols consciousness, experience, and symbolization denote the area where the process of reality becomes luminous to itself.

To the positive statements we, finally, can add three corollaries of a cautionary nature:

5) Reality is not a given that could be observed from a vantage point outside itself but embraces the consciousness in which it becomes luminous.

6) The experience of reality cannot be total but has the character of a perspective.

7) The knowledge of reality conveyed by the symbols can never become a final possession of truth, for the luminous perspectives that we call experiences, as well as the symbols engendered by them, are part of reality in process (Voegelin, 1970b: 220-21).<sup>2</sup>

The truth of these propositions can be tested, but not by the methods applied to propositions concerning objects of the external world. Rather one must place the propositions "in the historical field of experiences and their symbolizations":

The validating question will have to be: Do we have to ignore and eclipse a major part of the historical field, in order to maintain the truth of the propositions, as the fundamentalist adherents of this or that ideological doctrine must do; or are the propositions recognizably equivalent with the symbols created by our predecessors in the search of truth about human existence? The test of truth, to put it pointedly, will be the lack of originality in the propositions (1970b: 222).

There is no truth apart from the human experience of participation in a reality which embraces and transcends consciousness. Participation is more than an aspect of human existence. In that there is no vantage point outside it, participation "is existence itself". Therefore, "the role of existence must be played in uncertainty of its meaning, as an adventure of decision

on the edge of freedom and necessity". One therefore experiences existence as "metaxic".

It is obviously not *empirically* demonstrable that all human beings experience the world in this way; but the experience is available to all who undertake a meditative reflection, and is not merely a series of propositions one can decide to accept or reject. It has been articulated by philosophers whose insight is representative, not arbitrary. That is, on the one hand it is ultimate "in the sense that intelligibly it cannot be out-experienced or out-symbolized by further experiences of reality" (QH\_V: 107); on the other hand, the truth of the insight is not vitiated if some people are not explicitly aware of its truth. Elsewhere Voegelin writes that human consciousness "has reality in the form of participation . . . even when the existential tension is low and the reality realized by consciousness correspondingly small" (An-E: 168-69).<sup>3</sup>

In this account *the* two key terms are "participation" and "tension". "Participation" signifies that, within the whole field of reality, human consciousness is inherently both (i) active, creative, directed by intentionality, and (ii) receptive, responsive to a reality that is not merely constituted by the self or the consciousness. As Voegelin explains, at this point he differs from the phenomenology of Husserl. It would not make sense to reject "the magnificent work Husserl had done in clarifying the intentionality of consciousness". But intentionality is a substructure within comprehensive consciousness. "Reality, it is true, can move into the position of an object-of-thought intended by a subject-of-cognition, but before this can happen there must be a reality in which human beings with a consciousness occur" (An-E: 10-11).<sup>4</sup> When Voegelin writes that "the experience of reality has the character of a perspective" he refers to this single perspective of participation, which

is not merely one standpoint among others but is necessarily shared by all human beings. ■

To say that reality is characterized by "tension" implies that no existing entity, fact, value or proposition is absolute or autonomous: for example,

There is no such thing as a "man" who participates in "being" as if it were an enterprise that he could as well leave alone; there is, rather, a "something", a part of being, capable of experiencing itself as such, and furthermore capable of using language and calling this experiencing consciousness by the name of "man" (OH I: 1-2).

There are, therefore, no entities which can be finally known or defined within this reality: not the single human person, not "God", not the metaxy itself. We can never conceive of an entity or a fact apart from its context: it "exists" only in a constantly shifting relationship to other "existing" elements within the flow of reality. I cannot know myself objectively, for example, because "I" do not exist as a self-contained entity apart from the reality of which I am part, and one cannot know the part without knowing the whole. I experience the flow of historical existence only in so far as it emerges from and dissolves into the *Apeiron* (i.e. I experience existing things in their "lasting" and "passing", in their "ordered succession"); conversely, I cannot experience the *Apeiron* "neat", but only as it reaches into historical existence. I cannot know "freedom" as an absolute, but only as it exists in tension with deprivations of freedom, whether threatened or actual, and as it exists in tension with other factors which delimit its scope; factors such as "obligation" or "fraternity". And similarly, one must not define reality in such a way that it is reduced to its immanent dimension - for "immanence" only has existential meaning as one element in a field that embraces it.

Now, one might assert at this point that Voegelin is merely defining the transcendent into existence by a kind of ontological argument.\* But it is Voegelin's contention that we do experience both immanent and transcendent reality, and that "the several meanings of reality can be made intelligible by going through the successive acts of reflection on the process of consciousness":

If, in a first act of reflection on the process we turn toward the pole of the known the object of cognition will be something we acknowledge as real. If, in a second act, we turn toward the pole of the knower, the human carrier of cognition as well as his images and language symbols referring to the known will move into the position of the something to be acknowledged as real. And if, in a third act, we turn toward the experiential process and the cognitive tension as a whole, the process will be something we acknowledge as real . . . . The consciousness of reality becomes a process within reality (Voegelin, 1970a: 187).

Voegelin sums up the matter in his last major work: "Consciousness, then, is a subject intending reality as its object, but at the same time a something in a comprehending reality; and reality is the object of consciousness, but at the same time the subject of which consciousness is to be predicated" (OH V: 16).

Nothing has so far been established *about* the transcendent except that it cannot be repudiated without reductionism. The argument might seem remote from any political relevance. Its critical potential appears in Voegelin's attack on positivism. He writes of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*,

Feuerbach was disturbed . . . . by the fact that dogmatic propositions, be they theological or philosophical, survive socially, even when their fallacious character has been thoroughly analysed and exhibited to public view. There must be some reality engendering them and sustaining their life, after all, and since to a doctrinaire believer, if he is well shaken by rationalism, this reality can neither be a transcendent entity nor a truth experienced, the symbols must have some world-immanent



cause. . . . Thus Feuerbach interpreted the symbols as projections of the world-immanent consciousness of man. His psychology of projection has remained one of the pillars of the ideologist's creed ever since (Voegelin, 1967a: 252-53).

Voegelin argues that Feuerbach's critique of "fallacious" doctrines, however justified, lures him into a position which is no less fallacious, because it implicitly claims a privileged access to the experiences that engender religious symbols; this claim is plausible only because Feuerbach smuggles in as an assumption what needs to be shown, that human consciousness has decisively advanced to a position of positivist enlightenment from which theological statements could be dismissed as naive and obsolete. Feuerbach's positivism purports to arbitrate all truth, regardless of its own character as an articulation of consciousness from within reality. For Voegelin, on the contrary,

neither is there a tensional Metaxy without the divine and human reality as its poles, nor are there such poles other than those experienced in the existential tension. The Metaxy and the poles belong together as parts of the one reality that becomes cognitively luminous in the experience (Voegelin, 1981: 265).

The In-Between of existence is not an empty space between two static entities, but the meeting-ground of the human and the divine in a consciousness of their distinction and interpenetration (Voegelin, 1971b: 351).

Reductionism occurs when a thinker does not enter into this "meditative complex" but reifies its parts. This process may result either in definitions which wrongly claim to be definitive, or in the kind of dogmatic rejection Voegelin attributes to Feuerbach, by which the divine pole is denied and reality contracted into the pole of an immanent human consciousness.<sup>7</sup> Just as one might dismiss (necessarily without "proof") someone's claim to lack any experience whatsoever of freedom, so Voegelin would dismiss the claim to have no experience of

transcendence, without, of course, attributing dishonesty to the claimant. For,

Divine reality is being revealed to man in two fundamental modes of experience: in the experience of divine creativity in the cosmos; and in the experience of divine ordering presence in the soul.

The two modes are always structures in man's consciousness of divine reality, but they are not always conscious in the form of reflected knowledge ("The Beginning and the Beyond", Hooy).

Only at that historical moment when reflexive awareness has developed will the two modes of revelation be explicitly discerned: once discerned, however, any retreat from such awareness by competent thinkers manifests the existential disorder which, in his German writings, Voegelin called *Realitätsverlust*, "reality-loss" (Nieli, 1979: 254), and which he came to call "psychopathology" (An-E: 97) or "pneumopathology", this last a term taken from Schelling (An-E: 102). Though these expressions may appear unduly dramatic, they are not intended as insults but as blunt identifications of a reductionism. Voegelin knows, of course, that his contention is controversial; as we shall see, he marshals textual evidence in an attempt to show that those who do deny the transcendent *know* that they are irrationally proscribing perennial human concerns.®

#### Consciousness and Reason

Consciousness, therefore, is "the action and the passion of participating" in reality. When consciousness becomes "reflected knowledge" it may be called "reason" (*nous*). Reason is the self-aware experience of the finite process between birth and death, which recognizes what lies beyond itself. It is not posited hypothetically, but is *discovered* (in the case of Greece, by Ionian philosophers such as Anaximander) as "the area of reality in which the process of reality

becomes luminous to itself" (OH IV: 174, 177). The discovery of reason engenders new language symbols:

the Psyche becomes the site of conscious participation on reality; the Depth becomes the dimension of the Psyche from which new insights are drawn up; the Nous becomes the faculty of apperceptive participation in the process; Philosophy, the love of wisdom, becomes the tension of man's existence in search of truth; and so forth (*Ibid*: 177).<sup>9</sup>

In other words, reason is an historical phenomenon. Voegelin writes of "the rise of reason to articulate self-consciousness" (An-E: 89).

Reason did not exist in language in the history of mankind until it was formulated in the Greek fifth century as a word denoting the tension between man as a human being and the Divine ground of his existence of which he is in search . . . .

The word *nous* is applied by Plato and Aristotle to the consciousness of being in search of the ground of one's existence, of the meaning of one's existence - the search, the *zetesis*. One is in the state of ignorance, of *agnoia*; one asks questions, the *aporein*; and the answer is that the Divine *nous* is the cause that moves me to the search (Conv: 138).

As Voegelin elsewhere explains, the search "is not a blind desire" but already expresses insight:

we may characterize it as knowing questioning and questioning knowledge . . . . Without the *kinesis* of being attracted by the ground, there would be no desire for it; without the desire, no questioning in confusion; without questioning in confusion, no awareness of ignorance. There could be no ignorant anxiety, from which rises the question about the ground, if the anxiety itself were not already man's knowledge of his existence from a ground of being that is not man himself (An-E: 148-49).

This questioning is "inherent in man's experience of himself at all times". But "the adequate articulation and symbolization of the questioning consciousness as the constituent of humanity" is "the epochal feat of the philosophers" (An-E: 93). *Nous*, the symbol they developed, signifies both the human capacity for "knowing questioning" about the ground, and also the ground itself

which is experienced as the initiator of questioning. So, in the *Philebus*, Plato narrates how the gods give light (i.e. the light of the truth about the process of reality) to the human race through Prometheus.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to note that *nous* is a more comprehensive symbol than the Latin *ratio*, by which knowledge is severed from its roots in erotic attraction towards the Ground. Already Heraclitus recognized this attraction, and distinguished within it the modes of faith, hope and love. There is no reason apart from the experience of attraction, and no true experience of attraction without reason (An-E: 184). In this way, Voegelin's account of the *nous* enables him to avoid polarizations which are implicit in later and narrower notions of reason: such as the opposing of reason to experience, to passion or emotion, to faith or to revelation. For the *nous* is *itself* a passion, (motivated by an erotic attraction); and (as is articulated by the Prometheus myth) is itself a revelational symbol.

Because reason is intrinsically a search, it never escapes being also "ignorance" (*agnoia*). Now, ignorance is "profoundly disconcerting" for "from its depths wells up the anxiety of existence" (OH I: 2). But because this "anxiety" arises within the dynamic of divine attraction and human search,<sup>it</sup> is not an *alienation* from the ground of being.<sup>^</sup> *Agnoia* cannot be dispelled by knowledge, for it is the very condition of that wondering that is intrinsic to philosophy (An-E: 94, citing Aristotle). Conversely, *agnoia* is itself a form of knowledge, "and not the least part of that knowledge is the distinction between the knowable and the unknowable" (OH I: 2). Voegelin therefore speaks of "knowing questioning and questioning knowledge" (An-E: 148). He later worked out the concept of "reflective distance" to signify that "the thinker engaged in the quest for truth can remain, or become, aware of the structure of his quest". The thinker must

imaginatively symbolize truth", but is not obliged to regard these symbolizations as absolute (OH V: 40).<sup>12</sup>

### The Leap in Being

The exposition so far may be summarized in the words with which Voegelin introduces *Order and History*.

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 human experience in so far as it is known to man by virtue of his participation in the mystery of its being. It is not a datum of experience in so far 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 (OH I: 1).

Voegelin here goes on to a preliminary discussion of the symbolisms by which early civilizations articulated their experience of this community of being. There is first the symbolization of society and its order as a *microcosmos*, an analogue of the cosmos: "earth and heaven are so impressively the embracing order into which human existence must fit itself, if it wants to survive, that the overwhelmingly powerful and visible partner in the community of being inevitably suggests its order as the model of all order" (OH I: 5). Secondly, typically after a breakdown in the social order so radical as to dispel the previous trust in cosmic order, society may be symbolized as a *macroanthropos*, the individual person writ large. But this second symbol itself neglects one essential aspect of human experience, namely, participation in the community of being. In these circumstances, gifted persons (cf. OH II: 202) may become explicitly aware of their partnership *with God* in the community of being. They thereby become representative figures. This is what Voegelin means by "the leap in being": it is a "Platonic *periagogé*, an inversion or conversion toward the true source of order".

[It] results in more than an increase of knowledge concerning the order of being; it is a change in the order itself. For the participation in being changes its structure when it becomes emphatically a partnership with God (QH I: 10).

A converted society will "experience itself as qualitatively different from all other societies that have not taken the leap". As in the case of Israel, the community will experience itself as a "chosen people", whose life is meant to be a response to the divine initiative. This very symbol will itself become a tool for interpreting historical existence (*Ibid*).

The "leap in being" is itself a symbol, and is not susceptible to precise definition. It has, for example, more than one mode. Voegelin points to the distinctively different experiences of Israel and of Hellas (the term Voegelin uses for Greece under its civilizational rather than its geographical aspect): "In Israel it assumed the form of historical existence of a people under God; in Hellas it assumed the form of personal existence of individual human beings under God" (QH II: 169).<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, the leap in being permits an "existence in immediacy under God" (e.g. QH II: 4). In other words, God is not merely present to consciousness through some intermediate agency which partakes of divinity (such as a divine-human ruler, or the stars). But the structure of the metaxy is not changed by the leap in being, and human beings are not delivered from its inherent tensions, such as those between perfection and imperfection and between the divine attraction and the counterpull of appetite.<sup>14</sup>

Thirdly, "the leap in being, while it gains a new truth about order, neither gains all of the truth, nor establishes an ultimate order of mankind. The struggle for the truth of order continues on the new historical level" (*Ibid*: 3).<sup>15</sup>

Compactness and Differentiation

The "leap in being" is one instance of the noetic advance Voegelin calls "differentiation". He gives the following three principles:

- (1) The nature of man is constant.
- (2) The range of human experience is always present in the fullness of its dimensions.
- (3) The structure of the range varies from compactness to differentiation (OH I: 60).

In view of all that has been said about the fluid tensions of the metaxy, and the qualitative change in the order of being introduced by the "leap", Voegelin's first principle will not be suspected of postulating the existence of some static entity named "human nature". But all people have the same constitutive experience of the metaxic structure of historical existence, of participation in being.

The second and third principles have already been illustrated, in the operation by which the differing aspects of an experience (the object known, the reality of the experiencing consciousness, and the experiential process itself) can be progressively discriminated. In the compact experience, one might say, these elements are latent or unthematized, and the more differentiated awareness represents a gain in human understanding. But the structure of reality remains unchanged in the sense that the more penetrating and nuanced awareness is still no more than a perspective on reality, not a full knowledge of it. Any claim to full knowledge would turn a differentiation into a deformation.

As an example of the differentiating process, Voegelin cites the Hellenic philosophers' exploration of the structure of consciousness: compactly, the experience that reality extends beyond one's field of consciousness

"is present in the pre-Socratic intimations of the sameness of being and thinking, and of the *logos* of discourse with the *logos* of being":

On a more differentiated level, the observation of the process has induced Heraclitus, Aeschylus and Plato to develop the symbol of a "depth" of the soul from which a new truth of reality can be hauled up to conscious experience. . . . The Hellenic thinkers have transferred the older term [*psyche*] into the symbol for a site or matrix of experience that surrounds and comprehends the area of conscious experience. In its new symbolic meaning, the psyche has depth and its depth is unbounded; one can descend into the depth and explore it . . . . [dragging up] from the depth a truth about reality that hitherto had not been articulate experience (Voegelin, 1970b: 224-25).

This new insight is a differentiation: that is, it is not entirely new, nor is it a truth about some reality previously completely unknown.<sup>16</sup>

Voegelin sums up the insight gained through the differentiation of consciousness in three alternative formulations:

There is psyche deeper than consciousness, and there is reality deeper than reality experienced, but there is no consciousness deeper than consciousness.

Or:

We experience psyche as consciousness that can descend into the depth of its own reality, and the depth of the psyche as reality that can rise to consciousness, but we do not experience a content of the depth other than the content that has entered consciousness.

Or:

We consciously experience psyche as a reality extending beyond consciousness. . . . (Voegelin: 1970b: 224-27).

Many of Voegelin's analyses take the form of tracing differentiations or identifying deformations.<sup>17</sup> Nor does he hesitate to trace the process across cultures. For example, he suggests (OH IV: 229) that it would be an



"extraordinary theological assumption" to think of the compact experience of the *realissimum* which drew from Parmenides the exclamation "Is!", as other than the God who revealed himself to Moses in the far more differentiated thornbush episode of the third chapter of *Exodus*. According to Voegelin's analysis, this narrative subtly distinguishes between the complex layers of what is mystery and what may be revealed:

The flame in the thornbush seen by Moses is not God himself, but the "messenger of Yahweh"; from the flame of the messenger, then, sounds a voice proclaiming itself as the "God of the Fathers"; only when Moses has veiled his head is he permitted to approach and hear the command to lead Israel out of Egypt; the command, then, is endowed with added authority by the identification of the God of the Fathers with the "I am who I am"; and this differentiating revelation of the divine source of authority in depth finally leads to the revelation of the impersonal name of God as the "I am" (*Ibid*).

Thus the narrative embodies a series of advances in depth:

from the angelic fire to the divine voice and from the God of the Fathers, whose credibility is perhaps not unquestioned among the people whom he let fall into bondage, to the God who Is in his tetragrammatic depth behind whatever he reveals himself to be when he lets himself be seen by man; and, on the human side, from questions, hesitations, doubts, and resistance to ultimate surrender (*Ibid*).

#### The Virtue of Attunement and its Repudiation

Voegelin postulates a hierarchy of existence, based not on speculative reason but on the human experience of transience:

The more lasting existences . . . . provide by their structure the frame into which the lesser existence must fit, unless it is willing to pay the price of extinction. A first ray of meaning falls on the role of man in the drama of being in so far as the success of the actor depends upon his attunement to the more lasting and comprehensive orders of society, the world, and God (OH I: 4).

In this way, Voegelin endorses Plato's formulation "God is the Measure". That claim was an explicit rebuttal of the sophist, Protagoras, whose insistence that "Man is the Measure" affirmed human autonomy in a way which manifests a failure of *attunement*; in other words it reveals "the vices of infolding closure such as hybris and revolt" as opposed to "the virtues of openness toward the ground of being such as faith, hope and love" (Voegelin, 1970b: 220).<sup>19</sup> Voegelin praises Plato's own sense of attunement to the "ultimate mystery of reality": he "did not impose an index of apocalyptic finality on the meanings which, at this or that point of its course, flare up in man's consciousness":

In the *Republic* he even made it a point that a paradigmatically ordered polis, the *kallipolis*, would begin to decline from the moment of its establishment because it is beyond man's ability to translate the mystery of the cosmos into perfection in history. This equanimity was further fortified by Plato's insight that the culture of a society is always integral, expressing its attunement and adjustment to the order of the cosmos regardless of its position in the pattern of civilizational "advance". Good and bad are always in balance (OH IV: 223-24).<sup>19</sup>

According to Voegelin, it is the repudiation of attunement which constitutes the heart of ideology. It will therefore be helpful to trace one of his attempts to substantiate such an accusation, his critique of Comte in *From Enlightenment to Revolution*.<sup>20</sup> This critique will also reveal a significant aspect of Voegelin's scholarship. Usually, his expository prose is dense, meticulous in its attempt to deal accurately with complex material. It is occasionally incisive, often cumbersome. But he relishes intellectual combat, and on the trail of philosophical outrage he writes with a zest which transcends his manifest critical purpose.

*Comte as an Ideologist*

Voegelin discusses Auguste Comte (1798-1857) "both in his quality as an astute philosopher of history and in his more sinister quality as a spiritual dictator of mankind", as one whose insight has formed much of the "totalitarian practice of our times" (ER: 136). Voegelin is no antiquarian, and is as interested in Comte's reception by others as with Comte's own thought.

He argues that there was long assumed to be an incision in Comte's life between a first period, in which he appears as the theorist of positivism and the founder of the the science to which he gave the name sociology, and a second period in which he became the founder and the *Grand-Prêtre* of the new *Religion de l'Humanité*. Such liberals as John Stuart Mill and Emile Littré regarded the second period as manifesting a catastrophic decline in Comte's powers. Mill, reviewing Comte's later work, wrote in the *Westminster Review*, "Others may laugh, but we would rather weep at this melancholy decadence of a great intellect"; and Littré, (who left the *Société Positiviste* in 1851), mentioned a *crise cérébrale* of 1826 and suggested that the "absurdities" of the late work were pathological rather than philosophical.

It becomes clear that Voegelin's sights are trained on a still twitching prey; for he examines Littré's 1864 biography of Comte "to see at precisely what point a man becomes insane in the eyes of a liberal, intellectual Positivist" (ER: 137-38). Littré accepts in full the "law of the three phases", which Comte claims to have discovered in 1822. This law states that the mind passes through theological and metaphysical states which are essentially transitory in order to arrive at a definitive position in which it conceives of phenomena as governed by entirely immanent laws. For Littré, therefore, Comte's derangement appears only in his later attempt to

reintroduce *l'état théologique*. Voegelin's point is that Littré is here *representative*: one cannot understand the gravity of the Western crisis unless one realizes

that the cultivation of values beyond Littré's formula of civilization as the dominion of man over nature and himself by means of science is considered by broad sectors of Western society to be a kind of mental deficiency (ER; 140).

Voegelin's own analysis places Comte in a historical context in which the destruction of the prestige of both Catholicism and the monarchy had led such an influential thinker as Saint-Simon to declare himself the "scientific pope of humanity and the vicar of God on earth, the successor to Moses, Socrates and Christ". By recalling this claim Voegelin demonstrates that one need not invoke notions of sudden derangement to explain the Proclamation in the *Catechisme Positiviste* of 1852, by which Comte assumed for his associates "the general leadership of the affairs of the earth in order to construct, at last, the true providence, moral, intellectual and material" (ER: 141). On the contrary, the Proclamation fits into a clear tradition. Voegelin finds, in fact, that Comte's main work of positivist theory, the *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (6 vols., 1830-42), is already explicitly messianic, and underpins the quasi-religious formulations of the "second period".<sup>21</sup>

Voegelin continues his analysis, always following the line of Comte's own explication:

The works of Comte are not simply a series of treatises on various subject matters. They are connected with each other as the "elaboration" of an original "intuition". . . . The famous *hygiène cérébrale* which aroused Mill is therefore entirely appropriate to Comte's "operation": once the initial orientation and vision are given, the accumulation of new materials and the opinions of others can only disturb a process of which the end is known at the beginning (ER: 150).

Voegelin's case is clear: the central positivist insight, so acclaimed by Littré and Mill, already embodies an intellectual megalomania by which reality must not be allowed to divert the tranquil course of Comte's meditation. For Comte believed that the sequence of the three phases was not merely a phenomenological description of his own intellectual development. It was a societal law. His own life became for him the paradigm, even the apoalypse, of all human progress. So there emerged the cult in which every detail of Comte's reflections, habits, finances must be communicated to his colleagues; the cult by which the chair on which his "Beatrice", Clotilde de Vaux, sat during her visits to him should be preserved as a sacred relic; the cult in which Comte administers sacraments and "signs himself as *Fondateur de la Religion de l'Humanité*":

By his authority as the High Priest of the Occidental Republic he sends diplomatic notes to the non-Western powers. And finally he sends an ambassador to the General of the Jesuit Order suggesting that he associate himself with Comte in a demand to the Pope that the ecclesiastical budgets be abolished (ER; 158-59).

Voegelin is not simply trying to titillate his readers. For him Comte is essentially an "intramundane eschatologist" (ER: 145), one who is in the grip of *Realitätsverlust*; therefore, the more thorough and logical the thinker, the more spectacular the absurdity. He concludes that Comte and Littré are "brothers under the skin though the virtues and vices are variously distributed between them" (ER: 143). Comte has a profound insight into the extent of the civilizational crisis and the need for some spiritual authority, but is a megalomaniac, convinced he can plan and govern the course of history. Littré is free from the urge to dictatorship, but has no sense of the spiritual crisis or of "the problem of the institutionalization of the spirit", cannot discriminate between Christianity and the failings of the Church, assumes that with the destruction of

ecclesiastical prestige the crisis will be over, and is therefore appalled by any attempt, including Comte's, at spiritual reconstruction. The two polar attitudes are equally failures of "attunement".<sup>22</sup>

Voegelin elsewhere asks why competent thinkers engage in such denials of reality. He finds that Comte and the liberal positivists alike "achieved a certainty about the meaning of history and their own place in it, which otherwise they would not have had": however, "uncertainty is the very essence of Christianity":

Ontologically, the substance of things hoped for [cf. *Hebrews* 11; 11] is nowhere to be found but in faith itself; and epistemologically, there is no proof of things unseen but this very faith. The bond is tenuous, indeed, and it may snap easily. The life of the soul in openness toward God, the waiting, the periods of aridity and dullness, guilt and despondency, contrition and repentance, forsakenness and hope against hope, the silent stirrings of love and grace, trembling on the edge of a certainty which if gained is loss - the very lightness of this fabric may prove too heavy a burden for men who lust for massively possessive experience (NSP: 122).

The preservation of attunement is arduous. But it is pernicious to suppress the consciousness that historical existence is essentially "an adventure of decision on the edge of freedom and necessity" (OH I: 1).

#### Critical Comments on Voegelin's Account of the Metaxy

Voegelin moved to Vienna in 1924, and must therefore have been affected by the radical challenge issued to mystical and metaphysical traditions by the Vienna Circle in the 1920s and 1930s (Nieli, 1979: 4-18). The challenge was posed in Neurath's dictum, "If a question can be asked at all it can also be answered - it is senseless to speak of unsolvable riddles.". Carnap contended that a word has meaning only if there exists an empirical criterion for its application; and he wrote an article

against Heidegger baldly entitled, "*Die Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache*" ("The Overcoming of Metaphysics through the Logical Analysis of Language"). From this standpoint, the whole metaphysical tradition is based on a crude error by which the word "is" is converted from a copula ("I am hungry.") into an bogus ontological assertion ("I am.").

Of course, it did not take long for philosophers to realize that the prohibition of metaphysics is itself a metaphysical position. Once science and logic are no longer accepted as absolute, the doctrines of the Vienna Circle appear rigid and repressive.<sup>23</sup>

In any case, prohibiting metaphysics would not amount to refuting metaxic symbolism. That the metaxy exists is not a proposition of metaphysics. The metaxy is a symbol which requires human beings to take both history and transcendence seriously. It rules out, for example, what Voegelin (following Hans Jonas and others) identifies as the primary thrust of ancient forms of Gnosticism, the representation of the world as a prison from which humanity must escape, "an alien place into which man has strayed and from which he must find his way back home to the other world of his origin" (SPG: 9). Equally it prohibits one's limiting "reality" to the reality of phenomena. I wish to argue, however, that Voegelin's own use of the symbol of the metaxy distorts the structure of historical existence in three ways.<sup>24</sup>

1. As is shown by his discussion of Comte, Voegelin insists on the need to interpret historical movements at the level of spirit. Naturally, this position entails his rejection of the materialist view of history. He remarks, for instance, that people are

shocked by the horrors of war and by Nazi atrocities but are unable to see that these horrors are no more than a translation, to the physical level, of the

spiritual and intellectual horrors which characterize progressive civilization in its "peaceful" phase; that the physical horrors are no more than the execution of the judgment (*krisis*) passed upon the historical polity (QH III: 147).

However, he sometimes gives the impression that *only* spirit can be regarded as a causal principle in history. For example, in his essay of 1974, "Reason: the Classic Experience", (An-E: 89-115), he provides a "diagram of the points to be considered in any study of human affairs", in which three horizontal columns (Person - Society - History) represent the dimensions of human historical existence. An arrow indicates that the "order of foundation" of these dimensions moves in one direction only, from Person first, to Society, then to History. "Inversions of the order of foundation" are "not permitted". "Specifically, all 'philosophies of history' which hypostatize society or history as an absolute, eclipsing personal existence and its meaning, are excluded as false." (An-E: 113-14). His legitimate refusal to absolutize society or history, however, does not justify Voegelin in asserting, equally undialectically, that society or history has no formative impact on the human spirit, so virtually transforming "personal existence and its meaning" into an absolute.

This assertion is no momentary slip. Commenting on the nineteenth century "crisis", Voegelin notes the growth of an "escapist cliché" which is typical of liberalism: that the rhythm of Revolution and Restoration can be muted, that the notion of crisis can be "swallowed up by the category of progress under the guidance of reason". The cliché is escapist because it dodges the real issues of the crisis:

A society is by definition in a state of crisis when its remedial forces, while perhaps present, are socially ineffective. The social problems which urgently require a solution cannot be solved because the spiritual and moral strength for the task is lacking in the ruling group. . . . The true



alternative would be the restoration of spiritual substance in the ruling groups of a society, with the consequent restoration of the moral strength in creating a just social order (ER: 180).

As Voegelin admits, the pragmatic value of this alternative is not high: "the appearance of Plato did not change the course of the Hellenic crisis, the case of Nietzsche did not serve as a warning to Germany, nor did the appearance of Dostoevsky make a dent in the tsarist system" (*Ibid*). Even so, it remains for him the true alternative, and its neglect in favour of "propaganda for gradualism" (let alone for revolution) can only aggravate the crisis.

One ought not to depreciate the restoration of spiritual substance to ruling groups - or to anyone else. But Voegelin finds himself commending as the only legitimate response to social crisis a measure he admits is unlikely to work, repudiating on the strength of it all alternative measures. Such a position supposes that any institutional change (such as that in the legal system) is always futile without a *prior* conversion, and does not itself have the potential to form the moral sense; that the present rulers (who *ex hypothesi* gain from the injustice over which they preside) must be left in power pending their conversion; and that concrete political acts of resistance or reform cannot possibly mediate the spiritual conversion of those carrying them out. It seems that Voegelin does not *effectively* recognize the reciprocal influence of spirit and culture.

2. It seems that people of different gifts and temperaments differ widely in the extent to which the search for meaning occupies the foreground of their consciousness. The search must never, to be sure, be prohibited in the name of activism. Nor will it be acceptable, however, to posit the noetic search as the *single* criterion of the "good life".<sup>25</sup>

Michael Ignatieff has usefully discussed the tradition in which this aspect of Voegelin's thought seems to be rooted, a tradition of which the foremost representatives are St. Augustine and Pascal: "for Christians", writes Ignatieff (though, in fact, he is characterizing only one Christian tradition among others), "the tragedy of need is that human beings do not naturally 'hunger and thirst for righteousness' as they hunger for food". He notes "the perplexing fact" that lives given over to the satisfaction of ordinary material needs seem to be self-validating:

The simplest pleasure has the capacity to produce more genuine assurance of the worth of existence than many a tortured chain of reasoning about God's ultimate purpose for mankind. The terror of life, for Augustinians, was that it is so inexplicably endurable (Ignatieff, 1984: 61, 75-76).

Now Voegelin never explicitly maintains that all those who lack interest in philosophical enquiry are spiritually numb.<sup>26</sup> But it is for him *the norm* that the search for the good is primarily conducted by meditative practice, the *bios theoretike*.<sup>27</sup>

Another indication that Voegelin works with a somewhat monolithic image of the "search" (within the "Augustinian" tradition referred to) is the way in which he uses Pascal's concept of the *divertissement*. A *divertissement* is any activity which distracts a person from awareness of the true human lot, which is so miserable, says Pascal, "that nothing can comfort us if we think of it closely". It is not the diversion itself that is to be condemned but people's practical assumption that "the possession of the things which they seek would make them truly happy". Voegelin writes,

Pascal's analysis is deeply embedded in the Christian tradition, but it also . . . recognizes, as a new phenomenon of mass relevance, the man who is obsessed by the pursuit of happiness to the point of being blind to his creaturely finiteness. . . .

The Christian *contemptus mundi* is on the point of being forgotten and action in the world becomes the absorbing passion of man. . . . Pascal recognizes, as Helvétius did later, the uneasiness of existence, the *ennui*, as the mood which drives man into diverting action. But, unlike Helvétius, he recognizes the diverting character of action and he knows that the *ennui* may be overcome by searching in another direction than the release of passion. The return into the creatureliness of existence in order to meet the Grace of God is the Christian answer to the anxiety of existence (ER: 53-56).

This passage calls for comment on three grounds:

- (a) Pascal's insight is hardly as new as Voegelin implies. It is conveyed, for example, in the narrative of the Tower of Babel in *Genesis*, and especially in the Gospel parable of the rich fool who is soon to die.
- (b) Pascal's overall argument, however, is by no means biblical. As Voegelin makes use of it, its terminology precludes the essential attention to *loving* action. The equation of "action" with "diverting action" establishes a false polarity by which the release of passion through "diversion" is opposed not to loving action but to the noetic abstention from action: and only such abstention is taken to express a graced awareness of creatureliness.
- (c) the search for human fulfillment is represented as mere escapism. That is a travesty, as William Empson has argued pungently:

[Pascal said] that any man feels miserable if he shuts himself up alone for long enough and that that proves that his ordinary occupations are only a device for hiding from himself his real and fundamental misery. It is logically on a par with saying that all men are really and fundamentally dying of famine, and that they only keep on eating in order to delude themselves into forgetting this truth (Empson, 1987: 559-60).

Empson's mocking tone misses the anguish which underlies Pascal's argument. But the structure of his critique is valid. Against Pascal, for example, Empson identifies as an authentic human desire, "affection and good humour on a basis of adequate mutual respect". The Christian can properly accept the legitimacy of such a desire without

sharing Empson's aggressive secularism. The *contemptus mundi* must not be allowed to nurture indifference to others' true human fulfillment- or even to one's own.

3. Voegelin discusses the tensions of the metaxy almost exclusively on a "vertical axis". They are those between "life and death, immortality and mortality, perfection and imperfection, time and timelessness" (1970b: 220). Reason, too, is oriented exclusively to the transcendent: "The consciousness of being caused by the Divine ground and being in search of the Divine ground - that is reason. Period." (Conv: 138).

This type of formulation, which recurs in endlessly nuanced variants (thus scrupulously avoiding the danger of reification) requires a series of complementary assertions to be free from distortion; unfortunately Voegelin rarely makes such assertions. We have suggested above that "noetic consciousness" in Voegelin's sense is far from dominating many people's consciousness. It is obvious enough that activists might be oblivious to their need for growth in spiritual awareness. The contemplative, though, needs equally to avoid disdain for the pragmatic. Existence in the In-Between is, not least, the experience of struggle *amidst and between imperfections* (imperfect social structures, or governments, or flawed courses of action), which are nevertheless of crucially different value.

Now it is true that Voegelin does not deny this. According to his own methodological principles, he cannot simply re-define for his own purpose the symbolic term "metaxy" as generated by Anaximander and developed by Plato. No one symbol can fairly be burdened with the task of articulating the whole human condition, and we should value the symbol of the metaxy for what it can illuminate, not discard it for what it fails to express. Further, Voegelin insists, following Aristotle, on the

"integral nature" of human beings. Each person is at once a *zoon noetikon*, a *zoon politikon* and a *zoon historikon*, and also a being who participates in the whole "hierarchy of being from the *nous* down to [inorganic] matter" (An-E: 91-92).

But Voegelin's analysis, which begins by positing an integral human nature, goes on to claim that it is *thought* (not that comprehensive openness which includes love and hope) which "intends the ground":

The ground can be reached in this process of thought and be recognized as the object desired by the meditative ascent through the *via negativa*: the ground is not to be found among the things of the external world, nor among the purposes of hedonistic and political action, but lies beyond the world (An-E: 96).

This passage is at best ambiguous. It is true that the divine ground is not to be found in the external world as one object among others. But it is equally true that the divine ground can and must be reached by a *via positiva* no less than by a *via negativa*; that the two approaches must condition each other. To relegate politics to the realm of the trivial by placing the adjectives "hedonistic" and "political" in apposition, as if politics could not embody virtues such as justice and compassion, is negligent or mischievous. It is a reductionism equal to that of associating *action as such* with the inauthentic action which is *divertissement*.<sup>28</sup>

Voegelin's value as a corrective to the arrogantly blind social engineer still stands. But by failing to distinguish between authentic action (which mediates spirit) and corrupt action (which denies spirit), he splits salvation from historical fulfilment. This is quite as serious an error as conflating them, and is itself a contradiction of one crucial truth about the metaxy; that historical reality is, not least, constituted by human action.<sup>29</sup>

Since Voegelin appreciated the writings of Jacques Maritain (Sandoz, 1981: 64), a passage from Maritain's *Integral Humanism* may appropriately demonstrate how a spiritually mature sense of the metaxy can nourish the very commitment to political transformation which Voegelin distrusts:

The Christian must strive *all the more* to realize in this world . . . the truths of the Gospel; he will never strive enough to this end, he will never devote himself enough to improving the conditions of earthly life and to transfiguring this life. This state of tension and of war is necessary to the growth of history; it is on this condition only that temporal history prepares enigmatically its final consummation in the kingdom of God (1973: 110).

CHAPTER THREE  
HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE METAXY:  
EXPERIENCE AND SYMBOLIZATION

According to Voegelin, all theoretical accounts of human life and consciousness operate in a complex field where experience and symbolization constantly interact, even if some theories (such as those which claim to describe the world objectively, not merely to symbolize it) claim otherwise.'

Experience and its Articulation

If language-symbols are to articulate experience without radically falsifying it, they need to embrace the whole range of human experiences, including the most elusive ones. I begin by illustrating how such an attempt is made.

While imprisoned during the Spanish Civil War, Arthur Koestler passed the time practising his childhood hobby of geometry. He scratched a series of mathematical symbols on the wall of his cell, and suddenly discovered in himself a feeling of "enchantment" at Euclid's proof that the number of prime numbers is infinite. His elation was qualified only by a nagging discomfort, which, when located, turned out to be an awareness that he was likely soon to be shot!

Then I was flowing on my back in a river of peace, under bridges of silence. It came from nowhere and flowed nowhere. Then there was no river and no I. The I had ceased to exist.

It is extremely embarrassing to write down a phrase like that when one has read *The Meaning of Meaning* and nibbled at logical positivism and aims at verbal precision and dislikes nebulous gushings.

Yet "mystical" experiences, as we dubiously call them, are not nebulous, vague or maudlin - they only become so when we debase them by verbalization. However, to communicate what is incommunicable by its nature, one must somehow put it into words and so one moves in a vicious circle. . . . What distinguishes this type of experience from the emotional entrancements of music, landscapes or love is that the former has a definite intellectual, or rather noumenal, content. It is meaningful, though not in verbal terms (Koestler, 1954: 352-53).

Koestler found that the "intoxication" of the experience left him with "a sustained and invigorating, serene and fear-dispelling after-effect that lasted for hours and days. It was as if a massive dose of vitamins had been injected into the veins". He even came to believe that it was for him "the groundwork for a change of personality".

He carefully distinguishes the experience itself from the interpretation he gives of it, for "a genuine mystic experience may mediate a *bona fide* conversion to practically any creed".<sup>2</sup> He was filled, nevertheless, with "a direct certainty that a higher order of reality existed, and that it alone invested reality with meaning". And he also experienced the need to make certain propositional statements about reality in the light of his experience.

So he writes that three "orders of reality" became manifest. First, there was "the narrow world of sensory perception": second, there was the "conceptual world which contained phenomena not directly perceivable, such as gravitation, electro-magnetic fields, and curved space": third, an order which "enveloped, interpenetrated and gave meaning to the second":

Just as the conceptual order showed up the illusions and distortions of the senses, so the "third order" disclosed that time, space and causality, that the isolation, separateness and spacio-temporal limitations of the self were merely optical illusions on the next higher level. If illusions of the first



type were taken at face value, then the sun was drowning every night in the sea; . . . and if the conceptual world was mistaken for ultimate reality, the world became an equally absurd tale, told by an idiot or by idiot-electrons which caused little children to be run over by motor cars . . . [One] could not hope to grasp in cognate terms the nature of ultimate reality. It was a text written in invisible ink; and though one could not read it, the knowledge that it existed was sufficient to alter the texture of one's existence, and make one's actions conform to the text (*Ibid*: 353-54).

Koestler's narrative of "the hours at the window" yields five insights which lie at the heart of Voegelin's thought:

1. Symbols arise from experience and are quickly deformed unless they continue to be nourished by experience.

Voegelin says that the truth of symbols is evocative, not informative. They

do not refer to structures in the external world but to the existential movement in the Metaxy from which they mysteriously emerge as the exegesis of the movement in intelligibly expressive language. Their meaning can be said to be understood only if they have evoked in the listener or reader the corresponding movement of participatory consciousness (1981: 261).

Voegelin cites Aristotle's fragment *On Prayer*, concerning the mystery religions: "Those who are being initiated are not required to grasp anything with the understanding, but to have a certain inner experience and so be put into a particular frame of mind, presuming that they are capable of the frame of mind in the first place". As Voegelin explains, "the *cognitio Dei* through faith is not a cognitive act in which an object is given, but a cognitive spiritual passion of the soul" (*OH III*: 275). It follows that there is available no abstract language for articulating the experience, "but only the concrete language created in the articulation of the event":

the more abstract the language of the tension becomes, the more liable is its user to forget that language is part of the divine-human encounter in

which man's tension toward the ground becomes luminous to itself (OH IV: 39).

2. No description can render one's entire experience, for all description is conditioned by factors operating at three levels. Firstly language itself introduces distortions, such as the misleadingly clear-cut grammar of "subject/object" which splits a unified field of experience into apparently disparate entities, and cannot simultaneously express their unity.<sup>2</sup> Secondly and thirdly, description can never escape the perspectives of one's cultural heritage, - . Or the limits of one's own intellectual capacity and linguistic skill. Interpretation, therefore, *necessarily* distorts, and if the interpretation were taken to be definitive the experience itself would be destructively misrepresented.

3. Experience, nevertheless, can and must be articulated (at least to oneself and however tentatively), because the dangers of evasion are even more acute than the dangers of verbalization. According to the psychoanalyst Marion Milner, everyone

must have some emotional attitude towards the uncertainties of life, whether he call them Chance or Fate or Destiny or God. . . . In any case the more unadmitted it is, the more likely it is to be crude and childish, since it seems that only those attitudes which are in some way expressed can become truly mature (1986b: 142).

As the philosopher Barry Cooper has remarked, "Nothing can be said about experience that is not articulate, not even that it has occurred " (Cooper, 1986: 210-11).

Milner goes on to suggest, for example, that someone who

heroically repudiates religion in the name of maturity and truth may go through life giving intellectual assent to the scientific view of the universe and still be quite unaware that his feelings, as distinct from his opinions, lacking the educative and purging influence of expression, have remained far more infantile and distorted than those expressed in the forms he has rejected (*Ibid*: 143).

Koestler is perhaps too harsh, therefore, in speaking of the "debasement" worked by language. A limited power of denotation and connotation becomes a debasement only if verbalization is taken as definitive.

It follows that if there is a transcendent dimension of reality, it cannot be absolutely ineffable. Voegelin writes,

The ultimate essential ignorance is not complete ignorance. Man can achieve considerable knowledge about the order of being, and not the least part of that knowledge is the distinction between the knowable and the unknowable (OH I: 2).<sup>4</sup>

For his part, Koestler insists that the experience (and not just its explication) was "meaningful". In fact, one might say that it was not an experience at all "apart from" its meaning.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, meaning is itself an experience; for there is no such thing as "meaning" except as human beings appropriate it. Voegelin writes of "the impossibility of separating language and experience as independent entities":

There was no engendering experience as an autonomous entity but only the experience as articulated by symbols. . . . The truth of consciousness, its verification and advance, could not be identified with either the truth of statements or the truth of experience; it was a process that let its truth become luminous in the procedural tension between experience and symbolization. Neither the experiences nor the symbols could become autonomous objects of investigation for an outside observer (An-E: 11-12).<sup>6</sup>

4. Even though all interpretation is provisional, the interpretation of an experience can compel one's assent. Koestler speaks of "direct certainty": and he entitled a twenty-year segment of his autobiography by the symbol he developed to render this one experience, *The Invisible Writing*. What is more, his interpretation of the experience leads him to dismiss all theoretical accounts of the world which, by compressing into narrow compass what is allowed to be real or significant, would explain

the experience away. Without succumbing to what he considered "the temptation to surrender and creep back into the warm, protective womb of faith", Koestler abandoned "the concise, rational, materialistic way of thinking which, in thirty-two years of training in mental cleanliness, had become a habit and a necessity like bodily hygiene" (1954: 353). For example, he cannot but use a symbol, "orders of reality", that positivists would reject as non-empirical.

5. By his own assessment, at least, the complex event which was Koestler's interpreted experience transformed his life. (It is striking that he renders this transformation in symbolic terminology which is common to several religious cultures: "The I had ceased to exist".) Taken together, the experience and its symbolization possess a power beyond that of mere opinion: it has the "persuasive force" which is what Voegelin, drawing on *Hebrews 11:1*, means by "faith".<sup>7</sup>

#### The Development and Critical Understanding of Symbols

All societies symbolize their experiences. Voegelin describes four "typical features" which occur even in the earliest cultures' acts of symbolization (QH I: 3-8).

The first feature is the predominance of the experience of *participation* in "the community of being". The experience is of such intimacy that "the consubstantiality of the partners will override the separateness of substances". "Everything that meets us has force and will and feelings . . . . animals and plants can be men and gods . . . . the feathery morning sky is the falcon Horus and the Sun and Moon are his eyes . . . .".

Second is a "preoccupation with the lasting and passing (i.e. the durability and transiency) of the

partners". There arise symbolisms of hierarchy: "All human beings are outlasted by the society of which they are members, and societies pass while the world lasts. And the world not only is outlasted by the gods, but is perhaps even created by them".\*

The third feature is the attempt to render intelligible the essentially unknowable by analogy with what is known. Such attempts "have a history in so far as reflective analysis, responding to the pressure of experience, will render symbols increasingly more adequate to their task". Symbols, then, are not irrational, not immune to critique and revision. As Voegelin explains, in "The Beginning and the Beyond", their meaning is

not to be tied to the symbols so tightly that it can be conveyed only by strictly repetitive adherence to their language; it rather is assumed to be translatable without distortion into the language of reflective analysis. This assumption, then, can be sustained only if one assumes the original symbols to contain, however compactly veiled, a rational structure that can be made intelligible through reflection (Ἡσυχία).

Symbols can be elucidated without becoming redundant and without their capacity for illumination being exhausted. For Christians, the cross of Christ is an indispensable symbol. But not all possible understandings of the cross are equally valid, so it must always be *preached* to the community's actual and potential members.

The fourth feature is humanity's reflective awareness of the analogical character of its symbols. Any experience of existential order may become the source for such analogies; the rhythms of nature, the identified revolutions of sun and moon, the order of society. In turn, symbolizations of divine order may be used to interpret existential orders within the world. The fact that analogy is a reflectively aware act has two consequences. Firstly, the activity of symbolization must not be dismissed as "projection", as if those concerned were

deluded about what they were doing. Secondly, many cultures have shown a striking tolerance for conflicting symbolisms, accepting that the order of being can properly be represented in more than one way.

Every concrete symbol is true in so far as it envisages the truth, but none is completely true in so far as the truth about being is essentially beyond human reach. . . . The free, imaginative play with a plurality of symbols is possible only because the choice of analogies is understood as more or less irrelevant compared with the reality at which they aim (OH I: 7-8).

Voegelin therefore posits a dual structure by which symbols are at the same time freely chosen on the basis of human experience and determined by a reality to which they constitute a response (and which might transcend all human experience). Symbols, like the consciousness from which they emerge, have aspects both of creativity and of participation. This twofold structure has been aptly explicated in the concept of "appresentation". David Levy describes how Alfred Shutz borrows the term "appresentation" from Husserl to refer to the way in which an item of experience is taken to stand for something else, such as a footprint on Robinson Crusoe's island for another human being:

In all these cases an object, fact or event is not experienced as a "self", but as standing for another object which is not given in immediacy to the experiencing subject. The appresenting member "wakes" or "calls forth" or "evokes" the appresented one (Levy, 1981: 9, citing Shutz).

As Fiorenza writes, "In all communicative action more is appresented than is directly perceived" (1984: 217).

The awareness that symbols neither "refer to" reality nor "construct" it, but "appresent" it, determines what is meant by the "truth" of symbols:

Their meaning is not simply a matter of semantic understanding; one should rather speak of their meaning as optimally fulfilled when the movement they evoke in the recipient consciousness is intense and articulate enough to form the existence of its

human bearer and to draw him, in his turn, into the loving quest of truth. Only the whole of this process, not any part of it separated from the others, is the truth of reality as it becomes luminous to itself (Voegelin, 1981: 261).

Symbols, though always provisional, are likely to persist, since dimensions of human existence do not simply disappear. Discussing the symbolic complex of mortality and immortality in an essay of 1967, Voegelin suggests that two perennial perceptions are expressed by this symbolism. Firstly, "Man, while existing in time, experiences himself as participating in the timeless" (1967a: 264). Secondly,

Mortality means that man's life having lasted for a while will succumb to death; immortality means that man's life will outlast death. The meaning conveyed by the two sentences will be more clearly conveyed when they are combined into one statement: Man's life is structured by death (*Ibid*: 275).

Throughout the historical sequence in which the experience of mortality/immortality is articulated, particular insights will emerge into (or fade from) consciousness, and conflicts of doctrine will therefore arise between the various articulations. But the conflict of claims concerning "propositional" truths about mortality/immortality cannot be resolved apart from the willingness to undergo the meditative experience which engenders the symbolism. 9

Central to Voegelin's thought, then, is the belief that certain human experiences are fundamental. They cannot be repudiated, though they may certainly be distorted.<sup>10</sup> Much of his work traces the history of symbols which express such persistent experiences. Already in 1938, for example, in *Die politische Religionen*, he describes the vicissitudes of four such symbols; of hierarchy, of the *ekklesia*, of the relationship of "spiritual and temporal" (an unfortunate choice of terms, because of its implication that the

temporal is by definition non-spiritual) and of apocalypse.

He holds that the differentiation and the corruption of publicly influential symbols is at the heart of political history. Bringing such processes to consciousness could be a serious contribution to political life.

### Symbolism in Political Life

This contribution is exemplified by Voegelin's essay of 1940, "The Growth of the Race Idea". Its argument, though wide-ranging in the scope of its reference, is simpler and more focused than that of his elaborately constructed major works.<sup>11</sup>

Voegelin explains that his essay concerns the idea of race "as it is used by modern creeds, of the type of National Socialism, in order to integrate a community spiritually and politically". He will not take a partisan stand on the race question, and distances himself both from "the convinced believers in the all-importance of racial differences" and from "the equally convinced disbelievers, inclined to stigmatize the race idea as a mad illusion without solid foundation in fact" (Voegelin, 1940b: 284). Rather, he explains that the race idea is a *political idea*: that is, its function is not to describe social reality but to *constitute* reality by establishing a symbol which forges group identity.<sup>12</sup> It is therefore beside the point to criticize such an idea, however correctly, on the grounds that it is not empirically verifiable. The symbol

is based on an element of reality, but it does not describe reality. It uses the datum in order to represent by means of that single, comparatively simple element a diffuse field of reality as a unit. As a consequence, heated argument is possible about the merits of any symbol. Those who belong to the social group and believe in its existence will always be able to point to the element of reality



which is contained in the group symbols, and to prove that their social group is *really* a unit. Those who are politically opposed to the group in question will always be able to point out the discrepancy between the symbol and the reality which it represents (*Ibid*: 285-86).<sup>13</sup>

Further, it achieves little to criticize a political idea as if it were a disinterested scholarly hypothesis which, once corrected, would be retracted. Reviewing a book by Albert R. Chandler, *Rosenberg's Nazi Myth*, Voegelin remarks how "painfully obvious" are Chandler's conclusions, "that a number of authorities on the race question would not agree with Rosenberg; that his ethics can hardly find support in the Gospel", and so forth:

The great problems raised by the *Myth*; of the rise of intramundane religiousness, of its causes, of its social appeal, of the apparent helplessness of the Christian churches in the face of this threat, etc., are barely mentioned (1946c).

Voegelin himself, therefore, does not directly attempt to assess the "truth" of race symbolism, but instead describes its growth and function.

The race idea is "one historical instance of the general class of body ideas". Therefore, he begins his analysis with the "body" images current in Greek society, and finds that they are rooted in a sense of shared ancestry, but that the imagery is not abandoned when kinship ceases to be the foundation of social unity. Instead, devices such as formal "naturalization" are invoked so that people are *deemed* to belong to the family group. "Genealogies" may be established by cult as well as by blood. Granted minimal initial plausibility, the symbolic idea can stretch far beyond its original reference group without snapping.

A second root of race symbolism is the Pauline idea of the *homonoia*, like-mindedness, which unites the "mystical body" of Christ. The idea of the common ancestor has not disappeared altogether in this symbol, since Christ is

conceived as the "second Adam", the father of humankind spiritually as Adam was bodily. But the main emphasis of *homonoia* falls elsewhere, on the belief that

the *pneuma* of Christ is able, because of its *pleroma*, its fullness, to live in an indefinite number of human persons at the same time. Christ living in the members of the community constitutes the spiritual bond between them. . . . This construction, however, has the grave danger of dissolving the personality of Christ into the multitude of men who compose the *ecclesia*. We find, therefore, as an alternative speculative construction the idea that the *ecclesia* is the mystical body, and Christ is its head (*Ibid*: 290).

The two symbolisms have the capacity to control each other. The image of pneumatic unity expresses and requires openness to the whole of humankind; it stresses the dignity and uniqueness of individuals and the *charismata* that enable them to act on behalf of the community; and it is non-hierarchical in tendency. But without a complementary image of organic unity the image of pneumatic unity is potentially centrifugal.

Voegelin then traces the process by which, in Europe, the pneumatic symbol of the mystical body came to be secularized and "particularized". That is, the notion of community was transferred from "like-mindedness" to other symbolisms, such as the one in which humanity is unified by the common possession of "reason". Also, new symbols arose which postulated the unity of particular groups rather than of humanity as a whole, such as the symbols of nation and class. Once the figure of Christ is rejected as the source of unity, the subsequent spiritual groupings "can evolve almost any new set of symbols out of elements which are offered by the civilizational situation of the moment", such as "a pagan nationalism as well as of an equally pagan internationalism"; and "it may integrate into a new symbolic system economic factors, as in the case of communism, [or] biological factors as in the case of racism" (*Ibid*: 294).

The material basis of the race idea shifted away from the emphasis on blood. Though the age of discoveries provided a wealth of information on the "physical, institutional and characterological differences of the races", the 18th century *Histoire Naturelle* of Buffon still had as its dominant idea the unity of humankind, according to which the white race is normal and all others exotic variations caused by climate: so it is clear that "the correlation between racial differences and psychological or cultural traits is not yet due to a causation running from the body to the mind, but to the climatic differences which cause both independent of one another. A race, of course, can change when it is transferred to another climate" (*Ibid*: 296).

The concept of race became more fluid from the late eighteenth century onward, as the growth of historical consciousness brought to awareness such phenomena as the rise and fall of nations, the conquest of one people by another, and the patterns of migration. Voegelin compares two multi-volume works, one by the German liberal democrat Klemm, and one by the French aristocrat Gobineau, in order to show how a pattern of conquest-miscegenation which they both took to be axiomatic could be *evaluated* quite differently, in line with their respective attitudes to the fall of the French *ancien régime* (*Ibid*: 298-99, 302). A shared perception of the dynamics of socio-political evolution could accommodate widely differing social views.<sup>14</sup>

Voegelin identifies another factor. A community united in the *pneuma* of Christ was "open", in that it found its common centre "in a substance beyond the field of earthly experience". During the course of the modern age, the human personality and the political community each came to be represented as autonomous, oriented to nothing beyond itself, or "closed" (*Ibid*: 303).

Voegelin argues that this "closure" of the community brought about a fateful transmutation of the conception of race. In a Christian anthropology, evil in the world is "intimately connected with the status of man in general and every single human being in particular". Closure to transcendence, with a consequent rejection of the notions of sin and salvation, means that evil is also imagined differently. "The consciousness that there are evils which cannot be abolished but can only be made more bearable by humble endeavour has become rather dim even in countries which consider themselves Christian" (*Ibid*: 307). In particular, a closed group which attributes absolute worth to itself might well identify evil with those forces which are held to threaten the group, forces which become a "counter-idea".<sup>15</sup> At this point Voegelin applies the notion of the "counter-idea" directly to the phenomenon of anti-Semitism, for the Jews formed a convenient counter-idea to the unified image of Nordic race and German closed community.

Now if race is a political idea, which seeks efficacy not truth, it is only to be expected that the symbol is always susceptible to manipulation for directly political purposes. For example, a "sincere racial theorist like Guenther has advanced the idea of the 'blonde international' and considered a war between nations which contain Nordic elements a racial calamity of the first order" (*Ibid*: 300). However sacred racial identity is held to be, though, its articulation could not be allowed to obstruct political goals by seeming to undercut the importance of national boundaries. So even under the Nazis, examination of the theoretical basis of the race was prohibited beyond a restricted circle.

Naturally, the counter-idea itself is a political idea, not a descriptive one:

from the beginning the idea of the Jewish race was never conceived on purely biological lines but was

identified with a spiritual substance which may appear in persons who are not in any anthropological sense Jews.

Thus, H. S. Chamberlain coined the term, an "inner Jew":  
 a man may become a Jew very quickly without becoming a Hebrew; it may be sufficient to have intercourse with Jews, to read newspapers, etc., in order to become a Jew spiritually and characterologically. . . . There is enough of a factual basis to provide a tangible devil, and there is enough elasticity in the idea to manoeuvre any opponent [of the closed society] into the position of the Jewish Satan (*Ibid*: 309).<sup>16</sup>

In the last section of his essay Voegelin tries to show why the symbolisms of race and the demonic counter-race emerged more virulently in Germany than elsewhere. He points out that the German political community was integrated too late to be formed by either of the symbolisms which would have inhibited the growth of racialism: the Christian sense of the sovereign value of each human person, or the Enlightenment's dominant image of a humanity which is united by the possession of reason and political rights. Emergent Germany, on the contrary, was influenced by what Voegelin calls "the superstition of science", the "belief of general popular acceptance that social and political problems are scientific problems of the same type as those of the natural sciences": and he notes the "hectic sequence of scientific fads" which manifests this "superstition":

In the first half of the 19th century, when economics was the fashion, symbols had to be based on economic materials as in the system of Marx. The second half of the 19th century saw the rise of biology, and social problems had to be expressed in terms of evolution and genetics. . . . And now the biological type of ideas is threatened by dissolution from within because the latest fashion of science, psychology, develops a symbolism of its own, interpreting the belief in the earlier economic and biological symbols as the satisfaction of certain psychological needs (*Ibid*: 314).<sup>17</sup>

The characteristics and achievement of this essay may now be summarized:

1. It is "non-partisan", in the sense that Voegelin thinks impartiality to be intrinsic to philosophy; it does not have the explicit purpose of discrediting race symbolism as a "mad illusion".
  
2. It nevertheless embodies the philosopher's "resistance to disorder". Perhaps Nazism was able to rise to power and stay in power partly because there were insufficient such points of intellectual resistance. Anyone who works through the essay is likely to develop a degree of immunity to the rhetoric of race. Voegelin, of course, does not imagine that philosophy can of itself bring about the *periagogé* of all National Socialists to a life of truth. But the corrupted imagery needs to be challenged *at the level of the imagery itself*. At the conclusion of her own "anamnetic experiment", Marion Milner found that strenuous attempts to think out the problems of her life were always failures, if by "thinking out" was meant deliberate step by step reasoning. It was the activity of *dwelling steadily on the images that engrossed her* that made possible a "sensible and ordered life" (Milner, 1986b: 190). Voegelin's essay is a notable attempt to dwell on the images that engrossed a whole society.
  
3. Although Voegelin never calls the racial imagery of National Socialism "false", he does not shirk the responsibility of evaluation. His account of the notion of the "inner Jew" in particular, by showing how the symbol is manipulated, however implausibly, to the advantage of the powerful group which wields it, is a case where the refusal to obfuscate amounts of itself to condemnation.<sup>10</sup>

It would be a different strategy, complementary and equally necessary, to direct attention to the institutional or bureaucratic practices which protected and reinforced the symbolism of Nordic superiority. Voegelin was naturally well aware of these. Once safely in the United States, he explained the systematic terrorism practised by the Nazis in the short paper "The Totalitarian Climate".<sup>19</sup> Voegelin does not address himself to such measures in his formal works. He is writing within his own sphere of competence, as a philosopher. In addition, it is obvious that German and Austrian publishers could scarcely have published explicit attacks on the Nazis. Even granted Voegelin's discretion, *Die politische Religionen* was seized from the presses in 1938, as soon as the Nazis occupied Austria. But the omission, at least when the reader's attention was not drawn to it as soon as practicable (for instance in the essay of 1940), points to a serious deficiency in Voegelin's account of symbols: he ignores the *reciprocity* between consciousness and its symbolic articulations on the one hand and institutional structures on the other.<sup>20</sup>

4. According to Voegelin's own firm principle, racialism is explained *at the level of spirit*; he sees it as the demonic corruption of a symbolic complex (of *homonoia* and the "mystical body") which, if it remains open to transcendence, authentically articulates human consciousness in the metaxy. When "closure" - the conferring of absoluteness on any historical, and therefore partial, perspective on reality - becomes socially dominant, there inevitably follows spiritual and social destruction.

#### Concluding Remarks

It will now be clear why Voegelin, as a philosopher of history and society, strives always to deal with symbols (reflectively interpreted) rather than with "ideas". The belief that there is no such thing as an autonomous idea

or "truth" apart from the experiences which give rise to it and the symbols which articulate it, determined both his characteristic method and the very course of his life's work. He abandoned a huge project on the history of political ideas, the analyses of which took "over four thousand pages of typescript" and a fragment of which was to appear in 1975 as *From Enlightenment to Revolution* (Sandoz, 1981: 76-77) because "ideas turned out to be a secondary conceptual development" which eventually were assumed to refer to a reality other than the reality experienced. And this reality other than the reality experienced does not exist (AM: 79).

For ideas always draw their force from the matrix of sentiments in which they are rooted: the idea

grows and dies with the sentiments which engender its formulation and, with the great thinkers, its integration into a system of thought approximating the asymptote of rationality. Only insofar as the idea is understood as the approximately rational expression of the life of sentiments can we understand it as a historical entity (ER: 68).

With this insight gained, Voegelin courageously changed course and set himself a new task, "to establish the experiences as the reality to be explored historically" (Ibid: 81).<sup>21</sup>

But experiences can be explored only by exploring their articulations through symbols. This conviction led Voegelin to a further methodological principle, that *the reality of experience is self-interpretative*, so that the interpreter must approach the sources with respect as well as with a critical spirit. Characteristically, therefore, he worked from the original sources (learning many languages to do so).<sup>22</sup>

When, for example, Voegelin wishes to illustrate the manner in which the symbol "son of God" is transferred from Pharaoh, first to Israel as the "Chosen People" ("my son, my first-born") and then to Jesus (e.g. Mark 1: 11)



he begins by citing such Egyptian Pyramid texts as "This is my son, my first born . . . / This is my beloved with whom I have been satisfied". He demonstrates how the Pharaonic sonship was conceived as *representative*, so that the whole people participated in the divinity that emanated from Pharaoh; the symbol reinforced social stability by stressing every person's firm integration in the social order. Hence one can glimpse how scandalous those emerging from cosmological civilizations found the claim made by Christianity, according to which "an ordinary man of low social status" is claimed to be "the representative mediator and sufferer for mankind" (OH I: 74-76; cf. also *Conv*: 95-96). In this way, even Voegelin's more speculative remarks are invariably rooted firmly in his sources.

It is interesting to note, again, why he selects for analysis in *From Enlightenment to Revolution* the works of Helvetius and Turgot. Both are considerable if not outstanding figures whose writings were quarried by better-known ones; Helvétius by Bentham, Turgot by Comte. His choice allows Voegelin to consider certain symbols and concepts of the Enlightenment in the period of their gestation, before they became "doctrinally established".

In his discussions of Comte and Marx he claims not merely just to attack their arguments, but to show, where these thinkers recognized the validity of metaphysical questions but refused to consider them because such consideration would make their irrational opining impossible (NSP: 25).

Thinkers of this stature, Voegelin assumes, know what they are doing, and if they are to be refuted must be refuted not least out of their own mouths; "the reality of experience is self-interpretative".<sup>23</sup>

In any society, truth and untruth are in tension, though the personal, social and historical balance can

shift towards one or other pole. Writing in 1967, Voegelin delivered a sombre verdict, never substantially retracted, that our present age "must be characterized as an age in which deficient existence, as well as its symbolic expression, is socially predominant" (Voegelin, 1967a: 257). Concrete political evils could not be cogently challenged, still less rectified, unless the issue of deficient existence were addressed. But deficient existence cannot be remedied only from the scholar's study, and Voegelin's analysis appears to understate what many thinkers would hold to be a crucial insight: that authentic noesis itself cannot be nourished in the absence of certain kinds of prior commitment (such as the commitment to those people who are concretely oppressed by ideologies) that *are not themselves noetic*. Noesis and the political (as well as the "private") practice of love are related reciprocally.

## CHAPTER FOUR

FOUR MODES OF SYMBOLIC DISCOURSE:  
MYTH, PHILOSOPHY, THEOLOGY, HISTORYMyth

Reviewing the writings of Claude Levi-Strauss in an essay evocatively entitled "The Big Loose Poems that Rule Us", the Australian poet Les A. Murray has noted,

It is fair to say that everywhere outside the quasi-rationalist enclave which Western man has so recently created, the elaboration of myths has been perhaps *the* great human endeavour, since it is through them that man has attempted to order and make sense of the world and to live in a civilized, balanced way in that world. And, of course, this same use of myth still goes on in a disguised way within the Western enclave, too (1984: 50).

The very first, somewhat cryptic, sentence of *Order and History* makes an analogous point: "The order of history emerges from the history of order" (OH I: ix). In other words, the specific history of any human community is rooted in its experience and understanding of the "order of being". And this understanding is, in the first place, articulated mythically.

Since Voegelin holds that human beings experience the transfinite and are impelled to articulate what they experience, myth is in his view a form of discourse that can never become redundant. He writes that myths arise because "processes transcending consciousness are not experienceable from within" and because "for purposes of characterizing their structures we have no other symbols available than those developed on the occasion of other finite experiences". Therefore:

A mythical symbol is a finite symbol supposed to provide "transparence" for a transfinite process.

Examples: a myth of creation, which renders transparent the problem of the beginning of a transfinite process of the world; an immaculate conception, which mediates the experience of a transfinite spiritual beginning; an anthropomorphic image of God which finitizes an experiences of transcendence (An-E: 21).'

The "subject matter" of myth is,

openness towards the cosmos in the depth of the soul . . . . broken by the finiteness of human existence into the spectrum of birth and death, of return to the origins and rebirth, of individualization and depersonalization, of union or re-union with transcendent reality (in nature, erotic relations, the group, the spirit). . . . The myth itself authenticates its truth because the forces which animate its imagery are at the same time its subject matter. A myth can never be "untrue" because it would not exist unless it had its experiential basis in the movements of the soul which it symbolizes (OH III: 184).

While a myth cannot be inherently "untrue", Voegelin suggests, it can become "untrue" historically, by virtue of (1) the rise of spiritual consciousness to new levels, and (2) changes in people's relationship to their environment. He posits a process of differentiation in myth: at the most archaic level mythical forces express themselves through symbolic actions such as rites; at the next level there emerges the *mythos* itself, the tale of anonymous origin which interprets the rite; and thirdly individuals will use the hitherto collective myth to articulate "spiritual movements" of the soul (as, for instance, in the tragedies of Aeschylus). Finally, such freedom with respect to the myth transforms the way myth is experienced by the psyche:

when the myth need no longer be taken "literally" (if it ever was), the symbols can be manipulated and transformed deliberately in order to fit the exigencies of differentiated personal experiences. This is the fourth level represented by Plato, where the myth retains the seriousness of its "truth" but is at the same time consciously an imaginative play (Ibid: 185).

Reason therefore becomes free with respect to the creation and the interpretation of myths. Plato will criticize the Homeric myths - and will then create new ones: and the interpretation of myths, especially by those outside their original cultural matrix, will demand refined rational skills.<sup>2</sup>

But though a mature consciousness retains freedom towards myth (both freedom of interpretation and freedom to discriminate between the more and the less adequate), there can be no freedom *from* myth. Positivist science, Voegelin argues, was mistaken in supposing that myth embodies naive or superstitious propositions which must give way to those of a fully rational science. A "creation myth" for example, is *intentionally* symbolic. It articulates "not a beginning in the time dimension of the world" but "the experience of a lasting cosmos permeated by the divine mystery of its existence":

The reality of things, it appears, cannot be fully understood in terms of the world and its time; for the things are circumfused by an ambience of mystery which can be understood only in terms of the Myth. Since the divine Beginning, though experienced as real, is not an event in the time of the world, the imaginative creation story is the symbolism necessary for its expression ("The Beginning and the Beyond", Hooy).<sup>3</sup>

The rationalist attack on myth, though misconceived, became socially effective, resulting in the loss of Christian spiritual substance:

The mythical language was, at the time of its original employment, the precise instrument for expressing the irruption of transcendental reality. . . . In this [positivist] perspective only, when symbols and dogmas are seen in a "literal", disenchanted opaqueness from the outside, do they acquire the "irrationality" which brings them into conflict with logic, with biology, history, etc. (ER: 21)<sup>4</sup>

For authentic myth was *consciously* symbolic, and its loss warps the consciousness. As Voegelin concludes:

The terror of an infinitely overpowering, as well as the assurance of an infinitely embracing, beyond as the matrix of separate, individual existence, endow the soul with its more-than-human dimension; and through the acceptance of the truth of this dimension (that is, through faith) the separateness of human existence can, in its turn, be recognized and tolerated in its finiteness (QH III: 187-88).

Voegelin argues that "positive science", far from superseding myth, *is itself a myth*. The legitimate function of such "scientific" symbolic constructs as "reason", "race", "progress" and "proletariat" is obscured precisely by their pretension to *displace* myth. They might then become "perverted into intramundane, illusory objects, 'given', as if they were empirical data, into the cognitive and active functions of man". "Individual existence suffers an illusionary inflation because it absorbs into its form the more-than-human dimension": the source of evils is held to exist in institutions which can be changed; "the powers of man can create a society free from want and fear; the ideas of infinite perfectibility, of the superman and of self-salvation make their appearance" (*Ibid*: 188).

At this point Voegelin must be interpreted with care. He is far from identifying terms such as "reason" and "race" as intrinsically ideological. Once they are recognized as mythical they can be reflectively assessed, as are other myths, according to how adequately they represent the psyche's mature experience: but labelled as "scientific" they are in danger of being invested with a spurious absoluteness. As Thomas Nagel writes,

For many philosophers the exemplary case of reality is the world described by physics, the science in which we have achieved our greatest detachment from a specifically human perspective on the world. But for precisely that reason physics is bound to leave unexpressed the irreducibly subjective character of conscious mental processes, whatever may be their intimate relation to the physical operation of the brain (1986:7).

Science is no more than the exemplary case of a general truth. As will be seen, the corruption by which a mode of symbolic discourse hardens into propositional truth-claims threatens the best mythical symbols as well as the worst, the myths which assert the transfinite as well as those which repudiate it.<sup>5</sup>

Myth is irreplaceable, because it holds together two dimensions of reality - the transcendent and the immanent - in "a balanced manifold of experiences". These dimensions need to be reflectively differentiated, but are then all too likely to be split from each other, so that the experiential blocks "will be pursued to the extremes of a radically other-worldly faith and of an agnostic metaphysics" (OH I: 84). But *the poles do not exist apart from the relationship between them*. For this reason Plato himself made "judicious use of the myth" in order to link noetic consciousness with the process of reality from which it mysteriously emerged and from which it can never be independent. The mystery of reality cannot be lost or destroyed, but if mystery is relegated to the unconscious one is vulnerable to literalist deformations of myth which forgo the very differentiations gained by reason (OH IV: 224).<sup>6</sup>

One contemporary challenge to mythical discourse needs to be mentioned. It is sometimes argued that mythical thought is intrinsically conservative, because it articulates the world-view of those who do not yet think historically. According to Cassirer, myth explains the present conditions of life only by referring them to a remote past. Age itself becomes sacred, and to call into question the norms of antiquity is sacrilegious (1962: 224-25). A variant of Cassirer's argument is given by Roland Barthes. He calls myth the *depoliticized speech* of bourgeois society. By this he means that myth describes certain facets of the world without explaining them, thereby investing them with an aura of the given,

the unchangeable, what "goes without saying". It is true that Barthes omits to discuss the very genre of aetiological (i.e. *explanatory*) myths, such as the "Fall Stories" of *Genesis* which, for Cassirer, are the quintessential myths. Barthes and Cassirer, nevertheless, are driving at the same point: for explanation by aetiology, like the refusal to explain at all, inhibits the examination of contemporary and remediable causes.<sup>7</sup>

It is however, unwarranted to *define* myth as conservative, and Voegelin's account of myth entails no such conclusion. Firstly, some myths, such as that of Antigone are militantly "anti-conservative". In fact, the very myth of "the revolution" has a long tradition, and revolutionary movements create their own mythical structures to challenge those of their opponents. Secondly, as Plato's "playful" myth-making shows, myth is not necessarily a societal construction, but can be the fruit of individual creativity and freedom, perhaps explicitly in opposition to socially dominant forces.

### Classical Philosophy

#### *The Emergence of Philosophy*

Voegelin suggests that the breakthrough to philosophy was facilitated by the "historically unique circumstances" of Hellenic civilization, especially the "absence of temporal and ecclesiastic bureaucracies":

the transition from archaic to classic Hellas could assume the form of intellectual adventures by individuals, unhampered by the pressure of hierarchies which tend to preserve traditions (OH II:166).

In these circumstances "the break with the myth" and the new symbolic form of philosophy emerges in the eighth century in the work of Hesiod. In his *Theogony*,

myth is submitted to a conscious intellectual operation with the purpose of reshaping its symbols in



such a manner that a "truth" about order with universal validity will emerge. . . . The speculative reason of the thinker asserts its autonomy against the mythopoetic form of expression (*Ibid*:126).

Myth embodies "the compact experience of cosmic-divine order"; philosophy achieves the "leap in being" in which a "transcendent-divine source of order" is discovered, so that the self-consciousness of the philosopher becomes "the carrier of a new truth in history" (*Ibid*: 126, 167).

This truth is discovered by those whose social marginality frees them from domination by convention. Voegelin cites Hesiod's personal experience of distress and injustice (his father's poverty and his brother's success in seizing their meagre inheritance by bribing the local magistrates) to explain his attaining a moral awareness that enabled him "to pit his knowledge of truth against the untruth of society" (*Ibid*: 130). For as compared with the Homeric myths, the *Theogony* manifests a newly critical awareness of the ethical nature of divinity.

The predominance of ethical forces becomes the *raison d'etre* of the reign of Zeus. The other gods are "earlier" gods because of their savage lusts, their tyrannical cruelties . . . . While his victory [Zeus's, over the other gods] is won by force, it is held by the just distribution of his honourable share (*time*) to each of the immortals.<sup>e</sup>

Xenophanes, Parmenides and Heraclitus, "the mystic philosophers", "break with the myth because they have discovered a new source of truth in their souls" (*Ibid*: 239). The Homeric gods now come to be regarded as "unseemly", the product of capricious acts of imagination by which divinities are invested with human attributes, so that, for instance, peoples even make the gods in their own racial image. Xenophanes's conception of God opposes such fancies: "One God is greatest among gods and men, not like mortals in body or thought" (*Ibid*: 172). Instead of being theomorphically symbolized, experiences of transcendence are understood by the philosophers as

movements of the human soul itself. Significantly, therefore, by the same advance through which divinity comes to be understood as radically transcendent, so also "the true range of humanity comes into view". As always, of course, such a differentiation brings its own new danger. The process "may overshoot its mark",

in so far as the recognition of the invisible God may degenerate into the denial of the existence of God when visibility becomes the criterion of existence (*Ibid*: 239).

Like the "mystic philosophers", Plato attacks Homer not on aesthetic grounds but because of the inadequacy of Homeric myth. Certain symbolisms become unseemly when the order of existence can be expressed more adequately in the symbolism of the human soul. But further,

the language of the myth becomes opaque when it passes through the minds of enlightened fundamentalists. When the myth is no longer experienced as the imaginative symbolization of divine forces, but as a realistic collection of dirty stories about the gods, the educational influence even of Homer can become disastrous (OH III: 101).

On Voegelin's own principles, it must be said, Plato's second reason for condemning Homer is a poor one; or, at least, it could be justified only in terms of the immediate pragmatic requirements of educational policy. For "enlightened fundamentalists" will squeeze the noetic life from *whatever* they teach and, as Voegelin knows, Plato's own philosophy has been misinterpreted no less destructively.<sup>9</sup> The anticipation of future abuses does not warrant disdain for insights attained.

It is at least clear, though, that Plato does not oppose Homer on the "positivist" basis that reason does away with the need for myth and symbol. Plato knew that symbolism cannot be superseded in any such manner.<sup>10</sup> As opposed to analytic discourse (which is exclusively "active" or "intentional" towards reality), symbolic discourse is well-fitted to articulate the insight that

consciousness is constituted by reality before it can be the subject of reality (An-E: 11).

### *Philosophy as an Experiential Discipline*

Since noetic consciousness is a participation in reality, and since the noetic experience occurs when the structure of reality becomes "luminous" (to use one of Voegelin's favourite expressions), there can also be no polarity between philosophy and revelation. Voegelin writes of "the theophanic event in which the *nous* reveals itself as the divine ordering force in the *psyche* of the questioner and in the cosmos at large" (An-E: 101). In fact, the Hellenic philosophers regarded their insight as an experiential response to revelation. Voegelin therefore repudiates the contrast according to which philosophy is founded on natural reason and theology on supernatural revelation. This is a false opposition "caused by the theologians' eagerness to monopolize the symbol 'revelation' for Israelite, Jewish, and Christian theophanies" (OH IV: 236). On the contrary,

Unless we want to indulge in extraordinary theological assumptions, the God who appeared to the philosophers, and who elicited from Parmenides the exclamation "Is!", was the same God who revealed himself to Moses as the "I am who (or: what) I am" (*Ibid*: 229).

As the case of Hesiod has illustrated, philosophy is also experiential in a second sense: it is an act of *existential resistance to disorder*, not merely the enunciation of formally correct ideas. In these two ways, "[Plato's] philosopher does not exist in a social vacuum, but in opposition to the sophist" (OH III: 63)."

The central sophistic dictum is that of Protagoras. Since any verdict about the existence of the gods must be suspended, "Of all things the measure is man" (OH II: 273-74, 294-95). But the sophists' belief in human

autonomy merely follows from their failure to recognize their orientation to the transcendent. Gorgias's essay *On Being* takes the "symbols developed by the mystic-philosophers for the expression of experiences of transcendence" and treats them as if they had a meaning independent of such experience, naturally finding them to be logically unsatisfactory. The sophists, therefore, proceed in the same manner as the Enlightenment thinkers of the eighteenth century A.D., and similarly threaten to destroy philosophy, "for philosophy by definition has its centre in the experiences of transcendence" (*Ibid*: 275). As in the Enlightenment, also, the claim to empirical generality, the comprehensive, polymathic mastery of all knowledge, must substitute for the universality of transcendence (*Ibid*: 281).<sup>12</sup>

In Plato, therefore, the notion of the *philosophos* opposes that of the *philodoxos* (*OH III*: 65-67). The philosopher is one who *searches*, whereas the philodoxer is the one of diseased soul who argues obsessively, but only within the limits of mere empirical fact and opinion.

#### *Critical Comments*

Voegelin's conception of philosophy will now be clear. But when he works out its implications, his argument becomes disputable:

We have philosophers in English, but no philodoxers. The loss is in this instance peculiarly embarrassing, because we have an abundance of philodoxers in reality; and since the Platonic term for their designation is lost, we refer to them as philosophers (*Ibid*: 65).

Now, we have earlier seen Voegelin explain how those in possession of a truth can be tempted to consign their predecessors to a realm of falsehood. On Voegelin's own

account of the metaxy, all thinkers (not excluding Plato) operate within an inescapable tension between truth and untruth. It follows that it is legitimate to speak of the philosopher and the philodoxer as opposed "ideal types" but not to assert that any *person* wholly conforms to either type. Even if Plato himself be vindicated against the sophists, one must not posit two self-subsistent categories of thinkers: the authentic who are engaged in a quest for the truth, and the deluded who are only determined to obfuscate. Such rhetoric is itself a descent into the debating style of those "philodoxers" who only engage in battles of opinion, and smacks of a bid for dominance by the "philosophers"!<sup>13</sup>

This suspicion is reinforced by the defence which Voegelin elsewhere offers for his position. The discovery of transcendence, though it occurs in the individual consciousness, is not a mere subjective opinion. It is "endowed with the quality of an authoritative appeal to every man to actualize it in his own soul" (QH II: 187). This authority

is discernible even in such atrocious distortions as the colonization of "backward" peoples by the more "progressive" ones. While the objective authority of the appeal does not endow the prophet or discoverer from whom it emanates with a subjective right to maltreat his ignorant fellow men, there certainly is on the other side no subjective right to be ignorant. The unity of mankind is the community of the spirit (*Ibid*).

In the literary structure of a Platonic Dialogue such a claim to authority might be self-authenticating. Voegelin's analysis of the confrontation between Socrates and Callicles in the *Gorgias* provides an instructive example (QH III: 28-39). Callicles, unable to defeat Socrates in argument, crudely threatens him with violence. Socrates, unafraid to die, is revealed as the true statesman (Plato, 1960: 139-40). But then Voegelin suggests without cavil that by this formulation *Plato* "claims for himself the true statesmanship of his time".

He writes of "the existential order represented by Socrates-Plato", and adds, "the authoritative order is transferred from the people of Athens and its leaders to the one man Plato" (*Ibid*: 39).

Even this astonishing leap from the quasi-fictive pages of the dialogue to the historical order of Athens, contriving to damn all political opponents by literary representation, is less bizarre than an earlier passage:

The social conventions, which Callicles despises, are wearing thin; and the advocate of nature is brought to realize that he is a murderer face to face with his victim. The situation is fascinating for those among us who find ourselves in the Platonic position and who recognize in the men with whom we associate today the intellectual pimps for power who will connive in our murder tomorrow (*Ibid*: 37).

This passage was written, it should be noted, not during the period when Voegelin was indubitably at risk of arrest by the Nazis, but from an American professorial chair in the mid-1950s. As often throughout his writings one notices how the emotional force channelled into his scholarship can suddenly burst through the conventions of academic argument. It may seem gratuitous to highlight a passage that borders on the hysterical, and it would certainly be unfair to represent this kind of writing as the "real Voegelin". But it would be an equally unwarranted condescension to overlook (as an irrelevant outburst) what has survived the careful revision given to a major work. What makes the passage significant, both for his assessment of Plato and for his own intellectual stance, is the series of claims it implies: the title of "philosopher" is first reserved by definition for those who maintain their consciousness in disinterested openness to transcendence; secondly, the title constitutes them as authoritative guides to social order; thirdly, it is assumed that the title can be legitimately claimed for oneself. Neither the second nor the third claim follows from the first. Equally significant is Voegelin's confidence in aligning himself with Plato as

the true philosopher (whose insight into the requirements of social order is therefore normative) precisely at a moment when when his customary combativeness hardens into a bitter animosity.

Having said this, one must add that Voegelin's late work expresses an admirably subtle sense of the interplay between truth and falsehood, making explicit what I have argued to be implicit in the metaxic symbolism itself, and ruling out any hard and fast division of thinkers into "philosophers" and "philodoxers". Voegelin writes that the one who resists truth may be driven to do so by a true perception of the inadequacies of prevailing symbolizations. Conversely,

The thinker engaged in the formative quest is a human being plagued by the forces of self-assertive resistance in his soul just as much as his counterpart, the resister to the paradoxical structure of consciousness-reality, is plagued by the truth of reality (OH V: 37).

In the context of *In Search of Order* as a whole, this sentence seems to serve as a recognition of the greatness of Hegel irrespective of Voegelin's profound opposition to him. Unfortunately, though, Voegelin never revised his earlier assessment of Plato's conflict with the sophists in the light of the later formulation, even though Plato's thought so affects his own. He did not, it seems, care much for retractations.

To evaluate Voegelin's conception of philosophy, finally, it is necessary to return to the symbol *nous*.<sup>14</sup> He holds the discovery of *nous* to mark a new epoch in history; one could not retreat from the insight to less differentiated modes of experience and symbolization. The person of more primitive mentality is designated "mortal" (*thnetos*) by Plato, the one who positively resists the new insight is "dull-witted" (*amathes*): the "philosopher" is characterized by two equivalent symbols,

Plato's "spiritual man" (*daimonios aner*) and Aristotle's "mature man" (*spoudaios*).

It is important to notice what is and what is not claimed for the philosophers. *Nous* had already constituted human nature before its "discovery"; also, the depth of divine reality is not exhausted by what is revealed as *nous* (so that subsequent and superior insights are not precluded). The philosophers do not expect the discovery of reason to forestall the disorder of history or the violence of human passions. What they do claim is that spiritual status and maturity are specifically functions of the noetic faculty, so that Aristotle can define the human person as the living being possessing *nous*.

Voegelin denies that this claim for philosophy is a reductionism: if a given analysis was concerned

not with man's personal order, but with the order of his existence in society, it arrived at the abbreviating characterization of man as the *zoon politikon*. And if the analysis of man's existence in historical reality . . . had been carried by the classic philosophers further than it actually was, they might have arrived at the summarizing characterization of man as the *zoon historikon*. All three of the characterizations are true inasmuch as they summarize a valid analysis of reality experienced, but every single one of them would become false if it excluded the two others and claimed to be the one and only definition of the nature of man (An-E: 91-92).

Now to recognize the parity of these three dimensions of human life surely disallows one from locating the fully achieved human life in any single dimension. But as Voegelin goes on to discuss the "specifically human" reality of "existence in a state of unrest", it quickly becomes apparent that he regards this unrest as specifically a phenomenon of noetic existence, not of political or historical existence. For example, he argues, following Aristotle, that the unrest is not a



form of alienation (*alotriosis*) but is *joyful*, because it is itself the first phase of revelation and leads one to that act of questioning which opens one to theophany (*Ibid*: 99, 101). Unrest is for him precisely a phase and an indispensable condition of noetic life.'\*

To avoid the reductionism he has warned against, however, Voegelin would have to grant that unrest could lead people no less fruitfully into historical and political commitments which took the form of *action*. And, in the formulation that was criticized in Chapter Two above, Voegelin's conception of "action" in this context is restricted to "hedonistic and political" action (*Ibid*: 96). As he continues,

Positively, Plato identifies the One (*to hen*) that is present as the ground in all things as *sophia kai nous*; and Aristotle identifies the actuality of thought (*to energeia*) as the divine life eternal "for that is what God is". The complex of the *nous* symbols thus covers all steps in the philosophers' exegesis of man's tension towards the ground of his existence (*Ibid*: 96)

In writing "the ground of his existence" rather than "the ground of his noetic existence" Voegelin dissolves that interdependence of the three fundamental dimensions of human life on which he previously insisted. Philosophical awareness is implied to be the *single* way in which people encounter God.

In giving an absolute primacy to the noetic dimension Voegelin is not, of course, committed to the belief that human life can be lived exclusively in that dimension. Since the *nous* is also the faculty which perceives the true nature of human life as metaxic, it would be self-defeating to pursue immortality while repudiating that existence (biological, political) which is the metaxic scene of the pursuit.'\* But though this observation saves classical philosophy from entailing the advocacy of sheer flight from the world, it goes no way towards recognizing that it is love (and, as will be argued in

the next section, love indissolubly directed towards the ground and towards human beings) that is, no less than *nous*, constitutive of the search.

### Christian Theology

Gustavo Gutiérrez prefaces his discussion of theology as "critical reflection on praxis" by affirming as "permanent and indispensable" the two "classical tasks" of theology - as wisdom and as rational knowledge (1973: 3-15). As wisdom, theology is a meditative practice directed towards personal spiritual growth: as rational knowledge, it is an intellectual discipline born of the integration of faith and reason. These tasks are presupposed, but will also be modified, when theology accepts the equally necessary third function by which it reflects on practical Christian living in the light of the Gospel.

With two of these three functions of theology Voegelin scarcely engages. When he reflects on social and political theory or practice, he does so as a philosopher, not as a theologian; that is, he does not justify his criticisms by appeal to the Gospel and the traditions of its interpretation, but by appeals to reason. As for "theology as wisdom", he sweepingly suggests that it has ceased to be practised in the Christian churches:

Some of the early Christian thinkers like Origen have still the real cultural syncretism of mystical theology and the beginnings of doctrinal theology. Mystical theology is no longer practised in combination with doctrinal theology. Origen was a high point which has hardly ever been surpassed (Cony: 105-06).<sup>17</sup>

Voegelin concerns himself almost entirely with the second of the models mentioned by Gutiérrez, theology as "rational knowledge". Its noetic adequacy is therefore all-important for him.<sup>18</sup> We shall see that he achieves a valuable precision in identifying both decisive advances

and influential noetic deficiencies in Christian theology. But I shall argue that his perspective, because it is not complemented with other important insights, also leads him into certain distortions.

*The Pauline Advance and its Risks*

As always, Voegelin seeks the *experience* which engenders a given mode of symbolization. He considers what he calls the "Pauline Vision of the Resurrected" to be the decisive articulation of the spiritual experience which underlies the Christian Testament. (That is to say, we have no such *direct* access to the experience of Jesus himself.) St. Paul's experience "must be accepted as a real event in the Metaxy, constitutive of history", which a philosopher can do no more than try to understand. But to accept the event of the divine revelation to Paul is not the same as accepting a theological doctrine. A vision is an event, not a doctrine:

Any attempt to break up the mystery of divine-human participation, as it occurs in a theophanic event, is fatuous. On the subjective side one cannot "explain" the divine presence in the vision by a psychology of Paul. And on the objective side "critical doubts" about the vision of the Resurrected would mean that the critic knows how God has a right to let himself be seen (OH IV: 242-43).

According to Voegelin, St. Paul achieves a decisive advance beyond Plato, and in three ways. Firstly, his vision "carried Paul irresistibly beyond the structure of creation to its source in the freedom and love of divine creativity", so that "the transcendent God and his Agape were revealed as the mover in the theophanic events which constitute meaning in history". Once this *pneumatic* depth in reality has been articulated, Plato's symbolism of the *nous* no longer suffices to express the experience of transcendence. In "The Beginning and the Beyond" (Hooy), Voegelin makes an analogous point: in the Judaeo-Christian experience the divine is experienced

overwhelmingly as a "revelatory irruption" rather than as the ground which is also the object of a human search. The pneumatic event, whether the revelation to Moses in the Thornbush Episode or the revelation to Paul, is an experience of a new and compelling power.

Secondly, Paul achieved a differentiation in the universal experience that historical existence has a goal, an eschatological direction.<sup>19</sup> And thirdly, in his interpretation of Incarnation Paul has

fully differentiated the experience of man as the site where the movement of reality becomes luminous in its actual occurrence. . . . [Man] is the creature in whom God can incarnate himself with the fulness (*pleroma*) of his divinity, transfiguring man into the God-man (*Colossians* 2:9) (OH IV: 250-51).

As Voegelin explains elsewhere, the noetic core of the Gospel movement is the same as that of philosophy: both forms of discourse are symbolizations of the human tension towards the divine, by which human beings experience both the attraction of the divine and the "counter-pull" of "the world" (in the Johannine sense). In Christianity, this noetic core is given a distinctive *pneumatic* specification through the person of Christ, in whom the pleromatic presence of the Spirit is definitive (1971a: 80-101; 1981: 279-85).

Let us return to the first mode of Paul's advance over Plato, by which the primacy passes from *noesis* to *pneuma*. It does not follow that visions elude the critical control of reason. Voegelin writes, "When reading the Gospel texts one is always astonished by the noetic astuteness of the pneumatic visions" (1981: 281). Paul himself "was well aware that the structure of a theophanic experience reaches from a pneumatic centre to a noetic periphery" (OH IV: 244). For example, he offers rational criteria for evaluating the testimony of those speaking in tongues in Corinth: evidently, he does not

think pneumatic utterances to be self-authenticating. Voegelin sums up Paul's position in this way; "Without prejudice to the existentially ordering force of *pneuma*, the life in community is governed by *nous*". That is, *nous* is needed in order to stop pneumatic phenomena from degenerating into incoherence. But *pneuma*, the ordering force of the divine *agape*, is now the primary reality. *Nous* becomes the mark of a "teacher or prophet whose existence is truly ordered by the *pneuma*" (*Ibid*: 245).

Here, as always, even genuine differentiations bring their dangers. Firstly, emphasizing the force of the divine irruption will tend to weaken one's consciousness of the active noetic quest. So, in "The Beginning and the Beyond", Voegelin goes on from his acknowledgment of the pneumatic advance to suggest that the *structure of the quest* is nevertheless best articulated by the classical philosophers. Secondly, Paul's experience that reality has begun to be transfigured through the Resurrection of Christ needs to be critically controlled by Plato's noetic sense of the limits that metaxic existence sets for such transfiguration (*OH IV*: 249):

The overwhelming revelation of pleromatic presence as an event in the transfiguring course of history, however, tempts the pneumatic visionaries to expand their consciousness of epoch by imaginative expectations of a pleromatic transfiguration in the near future. . . . The imaginatively expanded consciousness tends to deform the epochal event within history into an event that will abolish history (Voegelin, 1981: 284).

Undue concentration on the process of transfiguration risks neglecting whole sectors of reality and experience which one must equally respect.<sup>20</sup>

### *Theology as a Deformation of Experience*

Voegelin argues that deformations set in when Paul's perspective is accepted as normative *in the absence of*

*Paul's own spiritual experience.* Once that happens, the very gain embodied in the Pauline writings is (*ex hypothesi*) abandoned, so that the loss of noetic control, the diminished awareness of the metaxic structure of reality, becomes decisive.

Voegelin holds that *theology itself* induces such a loss of contact with the Pauline vision. In the meditative process itself human reason and divine revelation are united. Any discipline which confines itself to articulating either the "human" or the "divine" side of the process fragments the experience. Therefore, Voegelin infers, such forms of discourse as anthropology, theology and psychology "are types of deformation and impermissible in a meditative investigation": and Jewish and Christian theology, because it is a "systematic doctrine", "belongs among the things which have to be cleared away today" (1984b: 47, 46).

In his view, as we have just seen, the understanding of the Pauline experience is a philosophical task. The root of theology is quite different: namely, the necessary but rationally dangerous defence against "folly". As it happens, the term "theology" is a *philosophical* neologism of Plato, coined in the context of his opposition to the sophists. According to *The Laws*, the sophists held the following triad of propositions:

- (1) the gods do not exist, or
- (2) they exist but take no thought for the human race, or
- (3) they are influenced by sacrifices and supplications and can easily be won over.

To these propositions Plato opposes a contrary but symmetrical set, and uses the phrase "two types of theology" to describe the true and the false triads (Plato, 1970: 411; see OH II: 273-74).<sup>21</sup>

Voegelin's point is that Plato did not merely oppose false doctrines with true ones. His whole practice was founded on the *refusal* to reduce meditational symbols to propositional statements (Voegelin, 1981: 269-70).<sup>22</sup> But theology, from its inception, is inherently a propositional mode of discourse. And even positive propositions about divine reality are not self-sufficient. They are valid only as a corrective to the falsehoods of those who deny the existence of the gods.

Voegelin illustrates his point from the writings of St. Anselm. He notices that Anselm uses the word "proof" (*probatio*) not in the *Proslogion* itself (for "when a believer explores the structure of his faith the existence of God is not in question"), but only in the discussion with Gaunilo, who acts the role of the "fool". (The "fool" is not the person of weak understanding but the person, possibly very intelligent, who *refuses* to be open to reality and therefore says there is no God.)

The symbolism of the noetic quest threatens to derail into a quarrel about proof or non-proof of a proposition when the fool enters the discussion. The existence of God can become doubtful because, without a doubt, the fool exists. . . . If the fool's part in the positive propositions is forgotten, there is always the danger of . . . believing the truth of these propositions to be ultimate. But the assumption of ultimacy would make them indeed as empty of the experiential truth in the background as the fools pretend them to be (Voegelin, 1986: 576, 580).<sup>23</sup>

It must be noted that Voegelin does not argue that Anselm was "wrong" to oppose the proposition advanced by Gaunilo (in his role as sceptic) with a counter-proposition of his own. Doctrine has the legitimate civilizational function of protecting insights already achieved against "the disintegrative pressures to which the differentiated truth of existence is exposed in the spiritual and intellectual turmoil of the ecumenic

situation" (OH IV: 43-44).<sup>24</sup> As he further recognizes, doctrines are capable of exercising significant critical functions.<sup>25</sup>

What he wishes to emphasize is the noetic cost of the necessary defence against the "fool". For doctrines, once enshrined, tend to be regarded as literal and autonomous statements of truth (even if the few thinkers dedicated to a meditative practice are able, from their own experience of the "abyss" between God and the human mind, to make the necessary negative counter-statements). In the present instance, "the great debate aroused by the *Proslogion* concentrated on the syllogistic merits and demerits of the argument that later came to be called the ontological proof of the existence of God, while the experiential context in which the argument was supposed to make sense was neglected" ("The Beginning and the Beyond", *HOQV*).

The argument, of course, is not a "proof" in the sense of a logical demonstration, of an *apodeixis*, but only in the sense of an *epideixis*, of a pointing to an area of reality which the constructor of the negative propositions has chosen to overlook, or to ignore, or refuses to perceive. One cannot prove reality by a syllogism; one can only point to it and invite the doubter to look. The more or less deliberate confusion of the two meanings of the word "proof" is still a standard trick employed by the negators in the contemporary ideological debate; and it plays an important role in the genesis of the "proofs" for the existence of God ever since the time of Anselm (*Ibid*: 36).

Voegelin acknowledges (.e.g. *Conv*: 94-111) that any given experience may need to be analyzed. But once analysis reaches beyond experience, symbols come to be regarded, by defenders and sceptics alike, as demonstrable propositions about realities erroneously taken to be objects of cognition. And then:

Literalizing the old myth carries with it the danger of literalizing every myth and, as the myth is the only symbolism man has to express his experience of divine reality, the further danger of deadening the



formation of man's humanity through man's openness to divine presence (OH IV: 37).

In "The Beginning and the Beyond" (Hooq), Voegelin claims that the insidious "penchant to hypostatize" is the most serious of all obstacles to the understanding of spiritual experience. The symbols petrify, the "fools" throw out along with the discredited symbols the reality which is symbolized, and propositional doctrines are then invoked to inhibit communal acceptance of the fools' repudiation. And even these latter defensive propositions, though necessary on one level, continue the vicious process by which noetic life is stifled.<sup>26</sup> In this sense, the doctrinal formulations provoke their own rejection. Such rejection is even valid in so far as it abandons the defective formulation: but it is disastrously invalid in that it tends to repudiate "truth experienced" altogether. Inevitably, therefore, new and inferior doctrines are inevitably spawned in their turn (Voegelin, 1967a: 259).<sup>27</sup>

The task facing anyone in quest of truth thus becomes even more formidable than it need be: "To accept the critical achievement on its own terms exposes one to the danger of falling into the trap of its deformation; roundly to reject the deformed result runs the danger of losing the critical achievement" (OH V: 53). There are no answers which escape the ongoing tension between truth and falsehood, because "imaginative perversion is not a mistake in a syllogism or a system, to be thrown out for good once it is discovered, but a potential in the paradoxical play of forces in reality as it moves towards its truth. The movement towards truth always resists an untruth" (OH V: 39).

At this point, the relevance of this discussion for our theme is clear. Voegelin alleges that the churches have nurtured in their adherents a destructive refusal to

reason and to question. Inevitably, once church doctrine loses its secure social base, the same entrenched refusal renders people vulnerable to those ideologies which can only survive as long as they remain unexamined.<sup>20</sup>

As we saw in the previous section, Voegelin holds that the churches have compounded the potential for distortion by endorsing a false dichotomy which is as ancient as the Jewish theologian Philo of Alexandria and the Christian Fathers, who "sought to assign to philosophy the role of theology's handmaiden", able only to construct a framework of *ratio* for the fuller truth conveyed by "revelation" (An-E: 186). Philosophy is itself a response to revelation. But in order to claim for itself a monopoly on revelation, the Church, "by an act of imaginative oblivion", eclipsed the revelatory dimension of the Platonic *nous*. The false polarization rebounded on the Christian movement:

history has taken its revenge. The nonrevelatory reason, imagined by the theologians as a servant, has become a self-assertive master. In historical sequence, the imagined nonrevelatory reason has become the real antirevelatory reason of the Enlightenment revolt against the Church (OH V: 43).

### *Critical Comments*

The broad lines of Voegelin's critique of Christian theology may now be summarized (in a manner he never does himself). He holds, firstly, that Christians are obliged to explicate their own spiritual experience by means of an anamnestic re-appropriation of the Christ-event, which as an experience is not to be doubted. But secondly, in becoming a "science" in which insights and experiences turn into systems and propositions, theology has lost its roots and has become a form of thought which misrepresents Christian experience. As a consequence, the attenuated sense of the quest (*zetema*) brought about by the conviction that one already possesses doctrinal

truth, coupled with the loss of noetic control already discernible in Paul himself, counts for more than the Christian pneumatic advance.

To assess the status of this critique, one might first ask if theology really is, as Voegelin would have it, a propositional science. Simply to appeal to the Platonic usage by which "theology" stands for two opposed triads of quasi-absolute propositions, as if that usage determined the subsequent course of an entire branch of human thought, is to commit a kind of etymological fallacy. It equates theology with doctrine and *defines* theology as an hypostatization of meditative experience.

But we have cited four descriptions of the theological task from Gutiérrez and Lonergan, none of which reduces theology to crystallized doctrine. In fact, no reputable contemporary theologian views theology as an attempt to demonstrate divine truth by logic apart from faith-experience. Voegelin vigorously criticizes those who claim a uniquely revelatory status for theology. But it is no less illegitimate to retaliate, as he does, by erecting a contrary dichotomy, by which only *philosophy* flows from experience.<sup>29</sup>

Even Voegelin's negative account of doctrine as such assumes what he needs to demonstrate; that doctrines or dogmas are severed from experience.<sup>30</sup> In fact, writing elsewhere about Toynbee's history, Voegelin acknowledges that definitions *do not*, in fact, close off the act of searching: "Definitions in the course of a *zetema* are cognitive resting points, which articulate the view of reality that has been gained at the respective stage in the existential advance towards truth": they may be "superseded" and "qualified" at higher existential levels (Voegelin, 1961: 184). But Voegelin fails to apply this insight to his discussion of doctrine. For it is a postulate of Christian theology that those who engage in

it do so from within the community and therefore *do* share in the pneumatic "experience of the Resurrected". The "school-theology" which in Voegelin's view had become split from mystical theology (1971a: 88) was written by people who were also deeply committed to a spiritual life. The integration of theology and meditation was always an aspiration even when least effectively achieved.<sup>31</sup>

Nor are doctrines intended to quell discussion or to constitute a "final" insight, for all doctrines, if not trivial, are later qualified by reinterpretation. They may not, it is true, be *superseded*, but Voegelin himself consistently states that a newly differentiated truth does not simply supersede previous expressions of that truth. Doctrines are both the precipitate and the stimulus of a search for truth which is communal, and, as such have an authentically *noetic* function.<sup>32</sup>

Even if we conclude that dogma as such does not dissolve noesis, however, we have not yet refuted Voegelin's charge against the churches: that they "did everything that could provoke the ideological rebellion, under the pressure of which they suffer today" (An-E: 191). In other words, he charges that they colluded in the attack on noesis, not only by specifying the community's normative beliefs, but also, by their emphasis on doctrinal orthodoxy, conveying that the less people at large thought for themselves on these matters the safer they would be.<sup>33</sup>

We must consider this charge a little further. As we have seen, the Christian movement advances beyond the Hellas in recognizing the primacy of *pneuma* and *agape* over *noesis*. Therefore, on Voegelin's general principles, one is not permitted to forego this advance by a deliberate retreat to the pneumatically more compact

Platonic account. The practice of reason remains indispensable, and without it *pneuma* could degenerate into the rampantly destructive force Voegelin knew so well from his experience of Nazism. To this extent, Voegelin's criticism is grave and cogent. But if reason provides the primary or *decisive* criterion for evaluating the Christian movement and Christian theology, *his critique itself* loses touch with the the pneumatic advance beyond Plato.

At the beginning of his essay of 1971, "The Gospel and Culture", Voegelin notes that the authors of the *Dutch Catechism* of 1966 felt obliged to insist - somewhat apprehensively - that the Gospel can offer its truth only to those who bring with them pressing *questions* about the meaning of their existence. Voegelin writes that there is a conflict "not between Gospel and Philosophy, but rather between the Gospel and its unenquiring possession as doctrine" (1971a: 61). He adds that the very apprehensions of the Dutch bishops reveal

an environment where it is not customary to ask questions, where the character of the Gospel as an answer has been so badly obscured by its hardening into self-contained doctrine that the raising of the question to which it is meant as an answer can be suspect as "a non-Christian attitude". . . . The Gospel as a doctrine which you can take and be saved, or leave and be condemned, is a dead letter (*Ibid*: 61-62).

In the case of Justin Martyr, for example, Christianity fulfilled his *philosophical* quest. The Logos has been incipiently operative in all those who live according to reason, so that "Christianity is not an alternative to Philosophy, it is Philosophy in its state of perfection" (*Ibid*: 60).

I wish to argue that this image of the quest leads Voegelin astray: for he implicitly limits its reference to the quest *for meaning*.<sup>34</sup> "The Gospel and Culture"

exemplifies his combining of a selective focus and a universal absolute judgment, in a passage where he summarizes what the Christian movement gains and loses in comparison with "classic philosophy":

It is richer by the missionary fervour of its spiritual universalism, poorer by its neglect of noetic control; broader by its appeal to the inarticulate humanity of the common man, more restricted by its bias against the articulate wisdom of the wise; more imposing through its imperial tone of divine authority, more imbalanced through its apocalyptic ferocity, which leads to conflicts with the conditions of man's existence in society . . . .  
(Voegelin, 1971a: 77).

The even-handed syntactical structure through which praise and censure are distributed in this assessment is intriguingly at odds with its tone. Three points of comparison are given. At least with regard to the second and third points, Voegelin views the Christian "gains" ambivalently, but the losses unequivocally.<sup>35</sup> He himself, therefore, seems to be guilty of the very mode of "derailment" he once attributed to Bultmann and the "gnostics", by which a valid insight is vitiated because the use made of it inhibits the recognition of equally essential complementary insights.

The Christian Testament responds to a quest for meaning, but even more fundamentally it responds to the quest for *agape*: in other words, to the quest for human community rooted in union with God, for the unrestricted love for people that is the condition of "remaining in the love of Christ" (cf. John 15: 9-10), and the quest for that love we *receive from* people which can then be experienced as the gift of God to us through them. Unless Jesus is understood as decisively incarnating the divine *agape*, in which others are to share (John 17: 26), he can be regarded only as one who achieves an essential noetic differentiation about the divine presence in the world: and there will be other, later differentiations. Further, the *agape* Jesus makes present is not to be

defined by its direct orientation to the transcendent. For the love without which one cannot know God is for "one another": *Agapetoi, agapomen allelous* (I John 4: 7-8; cf. also John 15: 12).<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, it is primarily the experiences of *agape*, as received from and given to God in Christ, and also as shared with human beings, that Christian theology must critically articulate. Voegelin assuredly insists that noesis is inseparable from faith in, hope in, and love of God (An-E: 183-84). But he does not, as theology must, explore the relationship between these movements towards God and the "horizontal" love of other people which the Scriptures insist are inseparable from them.

It is true that Voegelin denies wishing to deal with "problems of theology". *Order and History*, for instance, "is concerned with man's consciousness of his humanity as it differentiates historically" (OH IV: 302). But he does judge the Christian movement overwhelmingly on the basis that its self-expression has degenerated from noesis.<sup>37</sup>

One may conclude that it is mistaken to split either doctrinal propositions or the specifically noetic search from the totality of the "form of life" expressed in them. Voegelin acutely diagnoses one error but falls into the other.<sup>38</sup> It is this *unacknowledged* exclusiveness which in part vitiates Voegelin's critique of theology, and which distinguishes him from Gutiérrez, who begins *A Theology of Liberation* by acknowledging the need for models other than the one which he proposes to examine and commend.

### History

In his unpublished "History of Political Ideas" Voegelin notes how ephemeral was "the new philosophy of

world-immanent nature and reason" which superseded mediaeval culture:

The society that emerged from the storm had acquired a consciousness of the accidental character of its existence; the problem of its historicity had to be faced; and after the passing attempt of finding order in nature and reason, the theory of politics became inseparably linked with philosophy of history (Hooy: in the chapter, "The Great Confusion").

Reflection on the problems of history therefore pervades the whole of Voegelin's mature work. History, though, cannot in his view be a "self-sufficient" discipline: as the very first sentence of *Order and History* has it, "The order of history emerges from the history of order". That is: "every society is burdened with the task, under its concrete conditions, of creating an order that will endow the fact of its existence with meaning in terms of ends divine and human" (OH I: ix). The substance of history concerns the manner in which societies meet this burden.<sup>39</sup>

In Voegelin's view the symbolic form of history grows from two dimensions of awareness. Firstly, humanity exists within the Metaxy, and therefore is "in tension towards divine reality". The awareness of this truth is engendered by "spiritual outbursts" or "hierophanic events" in which divine reality is disclosed, and is then articulated in the language symbols of particular societies (since "mankind is no concrete society at all"). Secondly, this reality of things has a time-dimension. The hierophanic events have meaning because, in their very historical sequence, they point "toward a fulfillment, toward an Eschaton, out of time":

History is not a stream of human beings and their action in time, but the process of man's participation in a flux of divine presence that has eschatological direction. The enigmatic symbolism of a "history of mankind", thus, expresses man's understanding that these insights, though they arise from concrete events in the consciousness of concrete human beings are valid for all (OH IV: 6).



Voegelin's position here may usefully be compared with that of the historian, E. H. Carr. Charting the eclipse of the positivistic notion of history according to which the historian's consciousness is determined by "facts" (the "stream of human beings and their action in time"), Carr argues that consciousness and "facts" are correlative to one another. Just because there are no uninterpreted or "naked" facts, and no facts that are not constituted by some human interest, it does not follow, firstly, that facts do not exert some discipline on the historian; secondly, that history is only "something spun out of the human brain"; thirdly, that meaning is arbitrary or entirely relative (Carr, 1964: 7-30).

Now Voegelin is not troubled by the spectre of relativism, but he would not hold that "the facts" themselves can deliver us from it: rather, he considers that though consciousness constitutes reality it is also and equally a response to reality: it has both intentionality and luminosity. Whereas Carr posits a tension and a reciprocity between "facts" and "consciousness", Voegelin would relate them both to a further, a deeper, reality which both reveals itself and is sought for in history, and thereby constitutes history.<sup>40</sup>

This reality is *spirit*. In a lecture delivered in 1965-66 in Munich, which attempted "a re-consideration of the Nazi era", he recalled Nietzsche's classification of the three types of history: "monumental history", which uses the past as a source of inspiration, "antiquarian history", which consoles those who want to "abide in custom and revered tradition"; and "critical history, that is, evaluative and judgmental history" (1985: 8).

His German audience, he says, will seek no inspiration from the National Socialist period, and will not wish to

abide in its revered customs. There remains, therefore "critical-evaluative history". However, critical history does not consist of investigating past events "in the modern academic sense of critical research", or of imposing on them one's own value judgments, which are likely to be as banal and provincial as were those prevalent in the period under investigation. People can say "That is terrible" today, as they said "That is wonderful" then. One must judge "from a new spirit":

In order to write critical history, therefore, it is not enough to alter what one says; one must alter one's very being. Altering one's being, however, is not something which is brought about by foraging in the horrors of the past; rather, in reverse manner, it is the revolution of the spirit which is the precondition for being able to judge the past critically (*Ibid*).

He concludes that events must be placed "under the judgment of the spirit". This is the task of "all who stand within the continuity of spiritual desolation and who suffer under its burdens" (*Ibid*).<sup>41</sup>

Other elements in Voegelin's conception of history may be treated summarily. History, presupposes freedom, for there would be no history if social order was determined by instinct, as in insect societies. But this freedom, too, is oriented towards "the order of being":

Every society is organized for survival in the world and, at the same time, for partnership in the order of being that has its origin in world-transcendent divine Being; it has to cope with the problems of its pragmatic existence and, at the same time, it is concerned with the truth of its order. This struggle for the truth of order is the very substance of history; and in so far as advances towards the truth are achieved . . . the single society transcends itself and becomes a partner in the common endeavour of mankind (OH II: 2).<sup>42</sup>

Thirdly, history is constituted by the consciousness attained *in the present*. The past is retrospectively interpreted by the discovery of how it leads to the historical present. This means that historians are

always in danger of forming a reductively unilinear conception of history, according to which their own situation or consciousness is the *fulfilment* of history, so eliminating from consciousness all other lines of historical meaning.<sup>43</sup>

In his essay "Political Theory and the Pattern of General History", Voegelin notes that unilinear history rests upon a theological view of the world, "deriving its strength from the Christian belief that mankind moves through a sequence of meaningful phases according to a providential plan of salvation" (1944b: 747). But this view was distorted by being interpretatively aligned with the "closed horizon" implicit in the mediaeval Eurocentric perspective.<sup>44</sup>

On the contrary, Voegelin holds that history, since it is a function of human freedom and articulates the "unfolding" of human nature into an indefinite future, can have "no knowable meaning" (OH II: 2). There is *meaning in* history but no *meaning of* history:

History has a structure inasmuch as it has representative centres of reception from which revelation is communicated to the rest of mankind. This structure of history is a "mystery" in the sense of *Romans* 11:25 (Voegelin, 1964a: 75).

Voegelin goes on to locate the "mystery" in such questions as: why is there a history of revelation at all, and why is not revelation simply given from the beginning? why is it given to representative figures, rather than universally? why does it provoke human resistance?<sup>45</sup>

It is because history has this structure, of mystery brimming with meaning, that a philosophy of history cannot be "an amiable record of memorabilia", but must be "a critical study of the authoritative structure in the history of mankind" (OH II: 7). Truth about order cannot

emerge except historically; and conversely, history is structured by this same struggle towards the truth of order. History and philosophy are therefore, mutually constitutive (An-E: 116-36).<sup>46</sup>

CHAPTER FIVE  
POLITICAL ORDER AND POLITICAL STRUCTURES'

The Appropriate Focus for Political Theory

In a letter of 1942 to Professor Karl Loewenstein, Voegelin explained why he had ceased to teach courses in "Comparative Government". That discipline was "not a science but a college-institution", characterized by a methodology which he described as "descriptive institutionalism". The empirical description of institutions could never be foregone, but - especially at a time of "ghastly crisis" - must be secondary to an enquiry into the *motive forces which determine the institutions*, the kind of enquiry conducted, for example, by Nietzsche or Max Weber (Hooy). As Voegelin later wrote, "civilizational form"

results from the interpenetration of institutions and experiences of order. The institutions, to be sure, may break down under economic stresses, or through changes in the distribution of power, but when the afflicted society recaptures its strength for self-organization, the new institutions will belong to the same formal type as the old ones, unless there has also occurred a revolutionary change in the experience of order (OH I: 60).

Any theory of politics "must cover the problem of the order of man's entire existence": that is, it must presuppose neither "a free-flowing consciousness without corporeal foundation" nor "a corporeal foundation without ordering consciousness". To describe theories which obscure one or other sector of reality, Voegelin borrowed the term *skotosis* from Bernard Lonergan (An-E: 200-01).

The philosopher can reach the heart of political reality only by exploring "experiences of order". When, for example, in Book VIII of the *Republic* (Plato, 1955: 312-49) Plato describes the decline of a good polis, he does so in terms of an intelligible sequence in which different forces of the soul successively emerge as socially predominant. "Not only the good polis is man written large, but every polis writes large the type of man that is socially dominant in it" (OH III: 70). Plato's analysis "is in substance a theory of the decomposition of the soul through the metamorphosis of Eros", and the analysis is seriously misunderstood if Plato is presumed to have intended a schematic comparison of political systems (*Ibid*: 123-29).

In Voegelin's view, therefore, such writers as Karl Popper travesty Plato. They represent him as prescribing some ideal political system, and oppose to his system one of their own preference, typically inspired by a twentieth century liberal outlook (Voegelin, 1954). Such misrepresentation only exposes the attackers' own blindness.<sup>2</sup>

Voegelin shows, for example, how the *Timaeus* (written as a sequel to the *Republic*) artfully emphasizes the *mythical* nature of the paradigmatic polis ruled by wisdom. It exists in a remote golden age, and is recovered only in the form of "a drama within the soul of Plato" (Voegelin, 1947: 311, 316-17). As it happens, Popper never mentions this ruling literary device of the *Timaeus*. It is this insensitivity to myth, to the very genre of the dialogues, which invalidates his critique.<sup>3</sup> Voegelin alleges, then, that Popper projected his own "institutional descriptivism" onto Plato. For Plato, "philosophy is not a doctrine of right order, but the light of wisdom that falls on the struggle" (OH III: 62-63). In particular, "the very conception of a paradigmatic polis was . . . an instrument of critique

to be used against the not at all paradigmatic reality of the surrounding political scene" (OH II: 32).

Voegelin arrived early at his fundamental position that cultural practice, including political practice, is always rooted in *spirit*. In *Die politische Religionen* of 1938, he wrote that life in a political community

cannot be defined as a profane sphere, in which we only have to deal with questions of organizations, of law, and of power. . . . Man lives in the political community with all aspects of his being from the corporeal to the spiritual and religious (1986: 77).

In "Political Science and the Intellectuals" (Hoooy), an unpublished paper of the late 1940s, he argued that to explain social order in terms of a "contract theory", for example, is fatuous unless one can explain what is the nature of the common bond that lends binding force to *any* contract. Unless one experienced such a bond, one could logically assert only that social order "originates in actions of individuals who want to avoid the disadvantages of disorder"; but this assertion scarcely counts as an explanation and is really no more than "a sophistic opinion concerning the origin and meaning of order". Institutions and strategies are devised, developed, maintained or modified, to express *human purposes*. Just as one cannot understand a machine by itemizing its components while overlooking its function, so one cannot isolate a political system from the purposes that underlie it; and those purposes are not merely political.<sup>4</sup> As Voegelin elsewhere sums up his position:

Political science as an academic discipline focuses, with pragmatic intention, primarily on the institutions of national societies and the international organizations. These institutions are precisely the area of ideological . . . self-interpretation of order (An-E: 191).<sup>5</sup>

It is striking that Voegelin's disdain for a political theory that restricts itself to "institutional descriptivism" is shared with Marx. As Kolakowski sums up part of

the argument of Marx's essay of 1843 "On the Jewish Question", "Political revolution does not liberate people from religion or the rule of property, it merely gives them the right to hold property and to profess their own religion" (Kolakowski, 1978: 126). Again, in the Tenth "Thesis on Feuerbach", Marx repudiates the standpoint of "civil society" in favour of the standpoint of "human society, or social humanity" (Marx, 1977: 158).

Marx's position, of course, has a different basis than Voegelin's: Marx "is known even in his early days to have regarded politics as obviously nothing but the expression and elaboration of class rule" (Buber, 1958: 82). For Voegelin, contemporary institutions "offer only minimal opportunities of an access to the reality of knowledge"; and to become aware of "the great problems of thinking about order in Germany" one would do better to read the literary works of such authors as Robert Musil, Hermann Broch and Thomas Mann (*Ibid*).<sup>6</sup>

Thus, as C. H. McIlwain points out (1932: 22-23), when Plato and Aristotle speak of a state's "constitution" they mean not some formal code, but that *which makes the state what it is*, rather as one speaks of a person's "constitution". The content of Plato's "politics" therefore includes what would today be considered to be sociology, ethics, even theology. Voegelin is similarly inclusive, not now by instinct, as it were, but through a conscious conviction that there is no discrete realm of the political. For example, In "*Demokratie im neuen Europa*" (1959), he recalls the famous expression from Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, commonly attributed to Lincoln himself, concerning "government of the people, by the people, for the people". Voegelin points out that the phrase is borrowed from the Prologue to Wyclif's translation of the Bible (1384), where it reads, "This Bible is for the Government of the People, by the People and for the People". Thus, not only is one of the key



pronouncements of Western institutional democracy firmly rooted in a Judaeo-Christian *religious* insight, but the "people" turns out to be not just any political unit irrespective of the state of its culture, but specifically that community which remembers and celebrates its freedom under God (Voegelin, 1959: 294).<sup>7</sup>

To cut what we would now call politics from its roots prevents one's understanding even politics itself. Voegelin explains what such roots might be, again in the context of the modern attack on Plato:

Plato and Aristotle did not create "ideal states" (the very word "ideal" has no equivalent in Greek), but developed imaginative paradigms, models of the best polis. What is "best" again has nothing to do with "ideals", but will be decided by the pragmatic suitability of the model to provide an environment for the "best" or "happiest" life; and the criterion of the best or happiest life in its turn will be established by the science of philosophical anthropology (1953: 109).<sup>8</sup>

The deformations which occur when institutions are regarded as absolute may be illustrated by two examples given by Voegelin in the "History of Political Ideas". In three sermons delivered in Lincoln's Inn in 1745-46, William Warburton, Bishop of Gloucester, argued that the English State deserved divine protection because it represented a realm of freedom and light amid the surrounding darkness. Its exemplary status was not forfeited by the "Infidelity" and "Luxury" that, as Warburton admitted, corroded the entire life of the nation; nor by the fact (which he failed to mention), that the religious liberty of Nonconformists and Non-Jurors was restricted and that of Roman Catholics denied. Thus, notes Voegelin, Warburton placidly separated the structure of the English constitution from the corrupt "moral and spiritual substance of the nation". (As one might say nowadays, he reified the state.) The second instance is that of Gladstone's condemnation of the Roman Catholic Church as intransigent because, alone among

religious bodies in Britain, it would not agree to accept the civil order as beyond challenge in return for its internal freedom of worship. Voegelin terms the attitude shared by Warburton and Gladstone "totalitarian constitutionalism".<sup>9</sup>

Since a political order can be evaluated only by discerning how far it embodies "order" itself, and since political ills always manifest existential disorder, the exploration into "order" impelled all Voegelin's writing and teaching.<sup>10</sup>

He argues, in fact, that "there are no principles of political science, because there are no propositions". Rather there are common sense insights at many different levels. Power is known to be readily abused by its possessor, and therefore requires some provision for "advisory, controlling or vetoing instances". Cabinets must be of manageable size. Especially in areas peripheral to the person, such as administrative organization, such insights may have a lasting validity, so that studies such as that on bureaucracy by Max Weber may become "classics". But particular institutions "contain too many historical variables to admit typification". Voegelin's examples are illuminating:

The present Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany . . . . has weakened the presidential executive power as compared with the stronger position of the president in the Weimar Constitution because that stronger position made possible the rise of Hitler. The constitution of the Fifth Republic of France, however, has strengthened the position of the president as compared with the constitutions of the Third and Fourth Republic in order to avoid the frequent crises of government. Proportional representation is considered unfavourably by a number of German political scientists, again because it was a factor in the rise of Hitler; in America, however, it is looked upon with favour because it has often helped to break the power of a political machine at the municipal level (An-E: 210-11).

As soon as one goes beyond "commonsense insights" (the very elevated "commonsense" of a Weber!) one arrives not at propositions beyond which there lurk "principles", but at "the order of consciousness, by which commonsense insights receive their direction" (*Ibid*: 211).

His friend Gregor Sebba has suggested that Voegelin is better regarded as a political philosopher than as a political scientist (Sandoz, 1982: 24-25). This comment rightly interprets Voegelin's focus on noetic consciousness; though the instances I have cited (and the very title Voegelin gave to the Munich Institute) show that he considers even "political science" to be properly a theoretical and critical discipline rather than one that is merely empirical. As he insists (distancing himself sharply from traditionalist conservatism), "the contraction of political science to a description of existing institutions and the apology of their principles" constitutes "the degradation of political science to a handmaid of the powers that be" (*NSP*: 2).

#### "Justice" and "Order" as Political Symbols

If there is no separable realm of the political, neither is there a separable realm of the non-political, least of all in the dimension of personal consciousness. Voegelin demonstrates this familiar point experientially, by showing how the symbols of "order" and "justice" do not emerge as attributes of the individual consciousness, only applied subsequently to the public realm, but emerge precisely as political symbols.

Voegelin does not maintain that the public realm is ontologically prior to the private realm. On the contrary, "man's bodily existence is the basis for his social existence". Society expands from the family to that size in which the "material basis for the unfolding of the *eu zen*" can be met (*An-E*: 200). But he adopts the

methodological suggestion proposed by Socrates in the *Republic*: since justice in political society is written "in larger lettering" than in private affairs, it is easier to recognize there. Once it is recognized in political life, one can also find it more easily in the individual, "the smaller entity" (Plato, 1955: 101-02). This is why Socrates argues consistently from the communal to the individual.

So, in the *Odyssey*, the interventions of the goddess Athena do not favour ordinary people going about their business but *heroes*: "the hero in the Homeric sense can be defined as the man in whose actions a more-than-human order of being becomes manifest" (OH II: 104). In the *Suppliants* of Aeschylus, action qualifies as heroic when it embodies "the decision for *Dike* against demonic disorder"; and such action has the *public* purpose of enabling the polis to represent the order of Zeus (*Ibid*). By definition, then, heroic virtue is concerned with the restoration of societal good, not with the sheer stubborn retention of a person's individual integrity.''

No society, therefore, can do without its "heroes".<sup>12</sup> The very understanding of existence as metaxic, always in tension between perfection and imperfection, implies that society must never be regarded as irreparably evil (Voegelin, 1967a: 265). And because of this tension it also follows that work for social transformation is not to be polarized (as "disruptive") over against a "conservative" ideal of "attunement" to divine order, but can itself be an act of attunement. For attunement "is more than a docile conformity to the exigencies of existence"; it expresses active and passive participation, partnership in being (OH I: 4).

Voegelin never lost this sense that virtue and vice are inherently social. In the late essay "Quod Deus Dicitur", speaking again of "the fool", he writes,

In Psalm 13 (14), the *nabal* signifies the mass phenomenon of men who do evil rather than good because they do not "seek after God" and his justice, who "eat my people as they eat bread" because they do not believe in divine sanction for acts of unrighteousness. The personal contempt of God will manifest itself in ruthless conduct towards the weaker man and create general disorder in society (1986: 577).

This latter sentence makes it clear that the symbol "order" is cognate to the symbol "justice"; for the opposite to justice is *pleonexia*, the will-to-power, or the will to have more than others (QH III: 33-35, 207; cf. Cassirer, 1946: 75). Any modern reader who took the word "order" to have overtones of stasis, or to be best served by the maintenance of existing institutions and practices, would fatally distort Voegelin's thought.<sup>13</sup>

The word "order" (*taxis*) and its opposite "disorder" (*ataxia*) are for him, as for the Hellenic philosophers, terms of great weight and scope, applying equally to the cosmos, the psyche and the social order. In the creation myth of the *Timaeus*, the Demiurge brings matter from *ataxia* to *taxis*. To bring about social order is to act politically with the very authority of the Demiurge (QH III: 196-99). For Plato and Aristotle, an unjust "order" is no order at all, for the absence of order signifies the utter failure of a society to attain its end. To be attuned, such a society must be transformed.<sup>14</sup>

Now divine order is not to be regarded as some immutable structure of ethical norms capable of universal application. The notion of "the order of Zeus" must be seen in the mythical context of the "evolution" of Zeus himself as an ethical personality. In sections 71 to 74 of Hesiod's *Theogony*,

the predominance of ethical forces becomes the *raison d'etre* of the reign of Zeus. The other gods are "earlier" gods because of their savage lusts, their tyrannical cruelties, and, especially, because of the uncivilized habit of swallowing their

children in order to avoid an aristocratic sharing of rule among the immortals (OH II: 132-33).

Zeus, to be sure, overcomes the other gods by force, but his victory is fulfilled through "the just distribution of his honourable share (*time*) to each of the immortals". The "predominance of ethical forces" is ratified by an image of equity within the very divinity.

Therefore, in order to appreciate how the classical philosophers understand that "justice" which represents divine order, it would be inappropriate to attempt a definition of justice. Instead, one must trace the development of its symbolic articulation. Firstly, the philosophers come to see that human excellences, *aretai*, must be ranked in some order. The seventh century Lacedaemonian poet Tyrtaeus, for example, praises "savage valour" (*thouris alke*) as the specific virtue of the polis. As Voegelin notes, a perennial political problem is enunciated here: the polis "engenders the will to fight for the community regardless of the justice of its cause. . . . No questions must be asked (OH II: 190). The continued existence of Lacedaemonia depends on such "savage valour" moving the citizens. But in the *Laws*, Plato's Athenian says that those of "savage valour", though a polis needs them for defence against its enemies, may also be "reckless and insolent rogues, and just about the most witless people you could find" (Plato, 1970: 53). So valour is ranked fourth among the virtues, after wisdom, justice and temperance (OH II: 193-94)! Once the whole range of *aretai* is understood as a "transparency of life for the realissimum", the single *aretai* are relativized and revalued.

Voegelin goes on (OH II: 194-99) to discuss the elegy written by Solon, the sixth century reformer of Athens. The *dike* attributed by Hesiod to Zeus is ineluctable, so Solon prays, "Wealth I desire to possess - but I would not have it unrighteously; for *Dike* always catches up".

Voegelin notes that Solon here intends a theodicy. To think the world is senseless because "honest endeavour may fail, and the wicked ones may succeed" is a *doxa*, an illusion. Solon's positive principle of "righteousness", or "right order" (*eunomia*) rests on the renunciation of illusions such as the view that striving for wealth can be a sufficient human aim. At the core of *eunomia*, as its animating experience,

we find the religiousness of a life in tension between the passionate, human desire for the goods of exuberant existence and the measure imposed on such desire by the ultimately inscrutable will of the gods. . . . Solon is neither a middle class type who finds virtue in a medium situation because it fits his medium stature; nor is he a broken Titan, resigned to the frustration of his desires by fate. . . . Through openness toward transcendence, the passion of life is revealed as the *Doxa* that must be curbed for the sake of order (*Ibid*: 197).

Again, therefore, Voegelin shows that "order" is dynamic, always requiring strenuous resistance to *doxa*.<sup>15</sup>

The Hellenic literary development of the symbol "justice" culminates in the Judgment scene at the close of the *Republic*. The justice which is decisive for the quality of one's entire life is both formidably demanding and elusive. It is never less than the urgent resistance to injustice, and it can be recognized only existentially, not as an abstraction. Thus, those who are only conventionally upright, without a positive "love of wisdom", are deficient in justice because they will fail in a crisis: but "Plato does not offer recipes for moral conduct; and with regard to a right paradigm of life he does not go beyond a hint that in such matters the mean (*to meson*) is preferable" (QH III: 56-57).

Since justice is resistance to injustice one must naturally be able to identify injustice. As we have seen, the *Gorgias* characterizes injustice as *pleonexia*, the will to gain power over others. More elaborately,

the *Republic* represents injustice as a synthesis of three elements: *polypragmosyne*, "the readiness to engage in multifarious activities which are not a man's proper business"; *metabole*, "change or shift of occupation"; and *allogriopragmosyne*, "meddlesome, officious interference". When taken together and applied to the psyche, suggests Voegelin, these terms refer to "the inclination of desires and appetites to direct the course of human action and to claim the rulership of the soul which properly belongs to wisdom" (*Ibid*: 64).

The account in this last paragraph is incomplete in two ways. Firstly, justice cannot simply be an idea derived from its negation. Indeed, Voegelin elsewhere criticizes D'Alembert for inferring the nature of justice from a particular form of injustice (social oppression), which is envisaged as a prior experience (ER: 77-78).<sup>16</sup> Secondly, it seems unavailing to appeal to wisdom if the content of wisdom is as resistant to schematization as is that of justice. These two difficulties, however, are for Voegelin both resolved in the same way, by recognizing that wisdom and justice are apprehended only *meditatively*, in the vision of the "mystic philosopher":

In Plato's immediate environment the sophist is the enemy and the philosopher rises in opposition to him; in the wider range of Hellenic history, the philosopher comes first and the sophist follows him as the destroyer of his work through immanentization of the symbols of transcendence. The Platonic pairs of concepts, therefore [i.e. justice/injustice, truth/falsehood, philosopher/philodoxer], hearken back to the mystic-philosophers, and at the same time have a new weight and precision in order to match the weight and precision that untruth has gained through the sophists (QH III: 63).

Thus "wisdom" and "justice" are each symbolic articulations engendered by a *positive* experience that must be called "mystical". Their content must not be frozen in definitions deemed valid in the absence of such experience: that is the method of the "philodoxers".



When Glaucon and Adeimantus plead with Socrates to show them what is the inherent character of justice, for example, the entire *zetema* of the *Republic* begins, for what is offered by Socrates is not a formula but "lines of meaning winding their intricate way through the whole work" (OH III; 51).<sup>17</sup>

For Aristotle, too, what is "right by nature" (*physei dikaion*) is not capable of definition. Rather, the phrase explicates a tension between the divinely immutable essence and "human existentially conditioned mutability". Applied to the political order, justice is not positive law in the modern sense, but rather essential law within which there rises the tension between *physei dikaion* and a possible derailment into the making of laws by arbitrary human will (An-E: 59, 60).

This tension "can never be resolved theoretically but only in the practice of the man who experiences it" (*Ibid*: 62).

Aristotle, indeed, does give empirical content to his notion of political justice in Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: "the just in political matters is found among men who share a common life in order that their association bring them self-sufficiency and who are free and equal, either proportionally or arithmetically" (An-E: 57; cf. Aristotle, 1955: 188). But it is clear that Aristotle's position, that rights may be either (a) absolute, or (b) relative to one's value as a citizen, means that his own account will start as many debates as it settles. Mature discernment can never be rendered superfluous.

The whole of Voegelin's volume, *Plato and Aristotle* centres on the nature of the just political society. One further example will establish our main point. Voegelin cites from *The Laws* a surprisingly explicit list of the "axioms of rulership", posited as equally valid "for the great poleis and the small households":

1. Parents must rule children
2. The wellborn must rule the vulgar
3. The old must rule the young
4. Masters must rule slaves
5. The better must rule the worse
6. The thinking (or knowing, or wise) must rule the ignorant
7. The man chosen by lot must rule the man who is not so chosen (*Ibid* 318)

Voegelin does not comment on the obvious fact that some of these axioms may well be mutually contradictory, even though Plato's Athenian himself goes on to remark that the axioms could themselves constitute a source of civil strife (Plato, 1970: 138). The conflicts they imply can only be resolved at a higher level of existence: *and so it always is*. The social order, ultimately, is that which is created by the common participation in *nous* and in *philia*, in that community of spirit which Aristotle calls *homonoia*, (OH III: 321).

#### Political Societies: Structure and Spirit

The foregoing analysis has shown why Voegelin takes as his primary focus neither the pragmatic exercise of power and the stratagems that go with it, nor the merits and demerits of specific institutions. He wishes to investigate the self-understanding of political societies. It was this choice of focus which impelled his early break with his mentor Hans Kelsen, even though Kelsen's "Pure Theory of Law", Voegelin later agreed, "was so good it could hardly be improved upon" and "still stands as the core of any analytical theory of law" (AM: 21). What Voegelin rejected was "its claim to be a substitute for a theory of politics" (*Ibid*: 54).

As so often, the roots of Voegelin's position can be found in Plato. Take the discussion of the problem of law in Plato's *Statesman* (OH III: 161-64; cf. Plato, 1953: 508-18). According to the Eleatic Stranger, law can never be more than a "technical expedient as a rough

approach to a majority of cases"; it offers only general rules, whereas human action is personal and concrete. It is, indeed, "an inevitable appurtenance of social order", but only "because it is beyond the powers of even a perfect ruler to exhaust the vicissitudes of human life by individual decisions". The value of a corpus of law, therefore, depends entirely on the wisdom of the legislators. Further, just as good physicians *discern* their patients' condition, rather than act according to inflexible rules of diagnosis and prescription, it would be absurd if wise legislators were bound by their own rules.'<sup>9</sup>

The Stranger claims, however, that the ancient laws and customs deserve adherence, as the "second best" form of government, after that of the "true royal ruler". For, in practice, wise rulers (those who possess the *logos basilike*) are rare, and the worst condition of all is for the polis to be governed without knowledge, by tyrants or unwise rulers. The conservative counsel prevails in the *Statesman*, not on principle, nor because one particular group of politicians is adjudged stupid or venal, but on the basis of a grim judgement that it is normally imprudent to expect wise political leadership.

In the case of law, as with Plato's "axioms of rulership", conflicts are irresolvable except at a higher level. A rigid constitution can have no status superior to that of its framers' wisdom, and it will be regarded with contempt as its ossification renders it increasingly irrelevant. On the other hand, there is a lower level of wisdom than that embodied in the law, namely that of those rulers (the kind the Stranger expects a polis to have) who would, if they had power to revise the law, corrupt it not reform it.'<sup>9</sup>

What is decisive, then, is the quality of a society's legislators; more generally, of its political leadership.

But since leaders cannot lead unless their role is accepted by others, one is again pushed a stage further back, to the quality of a society's self-understanding:

Human society is not merely a fact, or an event, in the external world to be studied by an observer like a natural phenomenon. Though it has externality as one of its important components, it is as a whole a little world, a *cosmion*, illuminated with meaning from within by the human beings who continuously create and bear it as the mode and condition of their self-realization (NSP: 27).

This "illumination" occurs through symbolisms which are themselves prior to and independent of political science; in fact, political science itself begins with the "critical clarification of socially pre-existent symbols" (*Ibid*: 28).

To explain this remark, let us return to the symbolisms we sketched in Chapter Two, by which society was envisaged as either a *microcosmos* or a *macroanthropos*. "All the early empires, Near Eastern as well as Far Eastern, understood themselves as representatives of a transcendent order, of the order of the cosmos" (NSP: 54). Voegelin recalls that Gerhard von Rad "declared himself puzzled by the universal claims of the Imperial Psalms". Was not such symbolism "somewhat ridiculous under the conditions of the small Kingdom of Judah"? (Other scholars, says Voegelin, had not even adverted to the anomaly.) Voegelin attributes von Rad's puzzlement to "the absence of a philosophy of symbolic forms": the imperial symbolism does not express aspirations to world domination, and therefore "has nothing to do with the size or success of the social unit which uses the language". Instead, the Imperial Psalms show how Israel saw itself as representative of the divine order of the cosmos (QH I: 290-91).

In his earlier book, *Die politische Religionen*, Voegelin had insisted that "man lives in the political

community with all aspects of his being from the corporeal to the spiritual and the religious" (1986: 77; first published, 1938). It follows that power is never "naked", but must be rendered legitimate, and this is done symbolically. In a microcosmic culture, political leadership will need to legitimate itself by constructing symbolisms which (among other things) "achieve the union of the human-political sphere with the divine" (*Ibid*: 29). In the imperial religion of Akhenaton, for instance, the pharaoh himself constituted the people's only access to the will of the d $\acute{e}$ vinity. This "rigid system for the emanation of the divine will" was loosened by the Christian belief that everyone is *immediately* subject to God. But Voegelin showed how the sun-symbolism of Louis XIV and the theory of the National Socialist *Führer* each sought to annul the macroanthropic differentiation by reinstating the notion that the will of God is mediated to the people only through the leader (*Ibid*: 30-31, 67-70).<sup>20</sup>

The macroanthropic principle that the polis is the human person writ large (*Republic*, section 368) is both an heuristic principle for the interpretation of society and an instrument of social critique. Firstly, it is because a polis "reflects the type of men of whom it is composed" that Plato can interpret the successive changes of political order as the fruit of corresponding changes in psyche. Secondly, because the leadership of a macroanthropic society will have to legitimate itself in a way different to that of a microcosmic society (e.g. by its guarantee of human rights or freedoms) the principle itself can underpin the critique of any society whose order is actually "at the price of man". Its subversive potential is exemplified in the practice and the fate of Socrates (*NSP*: 61-63).

Finally, because "God and man, world and society form a primordial community of being" in the "quaternarian

structure" of the metaxy (OH I: 1), neither the microcosmic nor the macroanthropic principle can operate absolutely, to the exclusion of the other. Liberalism and totalitarianism give an unequivocal priority to the individual and to the political community respectively. But in order to sustain their plausibility both these ideologies must refuse to ask what the individual or the polis *themselves represent*; one or other is deemed absolute, representing itself alone.

In the "History of Political Ideas" Voegelin traces the process by which this spurious sense of absoluteness developed. After the Reformation, the major religious groups sought control of the temporal power, to win its support against other groups. "By the end of the sixteenth century the religious wars and the mutual intolerance of the churches had produced a new Western principle of politics, the *raison d'état*, subordinating the churches to the peace of the community. Thus government ceased to become "a charismatic function within the Christian *corpus mysticum*", and temporality metamorphosed into secularity. In the modern conventional approach to politics, Voegelin argues,

the results of the Reformation are accepted as unquestioned premises of discussion; a passing historical phase is endowed with the dignity of a natural order of things. . . . In the sixteenth century does not begin, as is conventionally phrased, a separation or differentiation of politics from a religious context; what actually begins is the elimination of the life of the spirit from public representation and the corresponding contraction of politics to a secular nucleus (Hooy).

Voegelin thinks that from the narrow perspective of such secularity, one can understand neither any politics before 1600, nor the "political religions" of our own century which have restored a *distorted* spiritual content to the secular fragment:

The separation of life into a political and a non-political realm is however only possible when the

members of society are prepared not to make a political issue of questions of reason and the spirit; only when there are no groups in society who wish to use state power to force their beliefs and ideas on their fellow citizens (Voegelin, 1959: 295, my translation).<sup>21</sup>

In such a despiritualized environment, competent thinkers settle for "institutional descriptivism", or take the pretensions of their own societies at face value.<sup>22</sup>

Voegelin's contrary procedure, as we have seen, is to probe the consciousness expressed in the structures of a society. It is important to notice the force of his position here. The ideologically based fetishism of external structures is not only theoretically inadequate. It has destructive practical consequences. His own position is well illustrated in a memorandum entitled "The Change in the Ideas on Government and Constitution in Austria since 1918", which he wrote for the "General Study Conference on Peaceful Change" which took place in Paris in 1937 (Hooy). The Austrian Constitution, he claims, was being manipulated as a technical instrument by groups (both Nazi and Communist) who aimed to destroy the Constitution itself. During 1933 and 1934, faced with such opposition, the government of Dollfuss invoked a distinction between the "authoritarianism" of Austria and the "totalitarianism" of Nazi Germany; prohibited the activities of the Communist and National Socialist parties (together with those of the Social Democrat party) and disarmed their members. Voegelin argues that the measures taken by Dollfuss ought not to be damned by the use of the term "authoritarian", without considering both their intentionality and the alternatives available in that specific context. Otherwise the term "authoritarian" is not a theoretical category, but an abusive ideological slogan.<sup>23</sup>

Conversely, National Socialist tactics exemplified the "abuse of a formalized democratic structure". In

his paper of 1940, "Extended Strategy: a New Technique of Dynamic Relations", Voegelin adopts his favoured method of locating the aberration in the words of the protagonists themselves. He quotes the testimony of Hitler, given at a trial in 1930 in Ulm:

The National Socialist movement will try to achieve its purpose in this state by constitutional means. The constitution limits our methods, not our purpose. We shall try to win by constitutional means the decisive majorities in the legislative bodies in order, as soon as we have got that far, to remould the state according to our ideas (Voegelin, 1940a: 194).

Even when in power, the National Socialists made frequent use of plebiscites to ratify their key political decisions. Here Voegelin's argument sharpens. This practice succeeded in mollifying the West only because *the West itself* held a shallow, formalized conception of democracy. For Voegelin, the practice of voting, whether for representatives or about specific issues, is "the last and relatively least important phase of the democratic process. The decisive question is, who shapes the issues and who presents the men?" (*Ibid*; 194).

His own conception of democracy is explained in the English version of *Anamnesis*, in the section subtitled "What is Political Reality?" written in 1966. Democracy, is best understood according to its intentionality, not its specific institutions. Any society is sustained by a "social field of consciousness": in other words, it can only survive if its members recognize certain obligations of conformity and allegiance. But besides the political society as a whole, there exist such other social fields as family, church, trade union, and political party, all with their own legitimate and disparate purposes. Pluralistic democracy, therefore, is a "precarious compromise by means of which one hopes to maintain a balance between the potentially disruptive fields and the sustaining field of an organized society" (*An-E*: 202).<sup>24</sup>



Political Representation

To the external institutional structure of a political society, Voegelin applies the term "elemental representation". Thus, one might define a "representative democracy" as any society in which "the members of the legislative assembly hold their membership by virtue of popular election" (NSP: 32). Such a definition would allow for the variant forms by which, for example, the chief executive of the U.S.A. is elected directly, whereas the British chief executive is a nominee of the parliamentary majority. The definition might also identify the Soviet government, say, as unrepresentative, because popular choice of the party of government is excluded: to which communists might retort that only through the exclusion of parties which serve special interests can government be made truly "representative" of the people as a whole. (Thus, the dispute would hinge "on the mediatory function of the party in the process of representation".) But the initial definition veils some confusing ironies:

at the time of the American Republic eminent statesmen were of the opinion that true representation was possible only where there were no parties at all. Other thinkers, furthermore, will attribute the functioning of the English two-party system to the fact that originally the two parties were, indeed, two factions of the English aristocracy; and still others will find in the American two-party system an ulterior homogeneousness that lets the two parties appear as factions of one party (*Ibid*: 34-35).

The study of institutions is indispensable, "because the external existence of a society is part of its ontological structure" (*Ibid*: 33). But it needs always to be placed in the wider context of what Voegelin calls "existential representation". For (as he estimated in 1951) there can be no doubt that "the legislative and administrative acts of the Soviet Government are domestically effective . . . making allowance for the politically irrelevant margin of failure" (*Ibid*: 36), and

therefore that it is "existentially representative" of the Soviet people. But by virtue of what? As he later put the matter:

That the government is tolerated is the result of its fulfilling more or less adequately the fundamental purposes for which a government is established, i.e., the securing of domestic peace, the defence of the realm, the administration of justice, and the welfare of the people (AM: 65-66).

Every society has some method and process (which Voegelin terms "articulation") of producing representatives, people "whose acts are not imputed to their own persons but to the society as a whole" (NSP: 37). A fully articulated society is one in which "the membership of the society has become articulate down to the last individual" (Ibid: 40). In such a society, in other words, every citizen contributes in some positive way (not merely, and not even necessarily, by voting, which is an event at the elemental level) to the process by which the representatives are continuously empowered to act on behalf of the society. Not every society, of course, is fully articulated. In many societies the people as a whole are not involved in the choosing of their leaders, and scarcely regard such leaders as representing themselves. Voegelin thinks, in fact, that full articulation occurs only in Western societies:

Symbolically this limit is reached with the masterful, dialectical concentration of Lincoln's "government of the people, by the people, for the people". The symbol "people" in this formula means successively the articulated political society, its representative, and the membership that is bound by the acts of the representative (Ibid: 40).

To consider what this conception of representation achieves, we must prescind (at least for the moment) from the question of whether Voegelin's estimate that Western society is "fully articulated" commands assent.<sup>28</sup>

Three conclusions, all of them consistent with Voegelin's general philosophical positions, emerge from the discussion. The first concerns the criteria for a truly "existential democracy". Since Voegelin's pithiest account of these occurs in an unpublished paper of 1939, "Democracy and the Individual" (Hooy), it may be permissible to quote him at length:

The problem of a working democracy can be stated in an abbreviated form as being: a people, consisting of individuals, capable and willing to take an interest in political issues, to form well reasoned opinions on them, to take the pains to acquire the necessary information, and to make their opinions and will effective by choosing representatives; there must be furthermore always a sufficient number of individuals who are willing to enter the business of government itself and to perform in such a way that regenerative contact with the opinion-forming multitude remains undisturbed.

When "the great mass of the people shirk their democratic duties", the reservoir from which leaders can be drawn dries up, and leaders become isolated from those they represent.

The second and complementary conclusion concerns the futility of attempting to transform a social order by recasting its institutions. The lack of such awareness, thinks Voegelin, led the West to aggravate international disorder through its "sincere but naive endeavour of curing the evils of the world by spreading representative institutions in the elemental sense to areas where the existential conditions for their functioning were not given (NSP: 51).<sup>26</sup>

But thirdly, the first two conclusions taken together by no means justify political apathy. On the contrary, the concept of the fully articulated community makes demands on every individual; demands which include, but are not limited to, the fulfilment of a defined procedural role. Everyone is responsible for political life in general and the operation of government in particular.

Political Maturity

The collapse of democracy in Germany led Voegelin to a diagnosis which exemplifies one of his central themes: "The majority of German citizens had given up, or never obtained, the status of individuals with well-reasoned opinions, but preferred to have instead convictions" ("Democracy and the Individual", Hooy).

The circumstances of his escape from Vienna in 1938 made clear to Voegelin that "there was a stratum of stupidity as a relevant social factor . . . and that the quest for truth, the philosophical investigation, was a very thin upper stratum in any civilization or society, on any occasion always distinct from massive reactions on the part of the mass of stupid people who surround us" (Voegelin, in Lawrence, 1984: 114-15). This "stupidity" is unrelated to class or to formal educational attainment: the two people whom Voegelin had especially in mind were a professor of Germanic law and a Harvard-educated American vice-consul.<sup>27</sup>

The polar category to the stupid (Aristotle's *plethos*, the "mass of passionately directed people . . . who do not know what they are doing") is that of the *spoudaioi*, "the very few mature people who maintain the civilization" (*Ibid*). Without them, any society will break down inevitably and rapidly.<sup>28</sup> One is therefore brought back to questions of conscience:

Does ignorance cause us to hold certain beliefs with a good conscience, or does our will to hold certain beliefs cause us to remain ignorant with regard to certain facts? And if the latter should be the case, does the end of holding a certain belief justify the means of ignorance (Lawrence, 1984: 112).

Any philosophical theory of conscience, he concludes, must be rooted in "a theory of the nature of man", since

"conscience can only be as good as the man who has it". Where an impoverished understanding of human nature prevails, intellectual and moral confusion will abound "which paves the way for the best of all consciences, that of the totalitarian killers". Enough of them are rampant, and "this is no time to pat the viciously ignorant on the back for being 'sincere'" (*Ibid*: 114).

Some of Voegelin's most pungent historical critiques focus on "folly" in this sense: more precisely, on the social enforcement of folly. With Voegelin's charge against the "Oxford Political Philosophers" in mind, I quote one of his examples from English history. In the "History of Political Ideas", he describes the measures which disbarred from their ministry the most conscientious clerics, whether among dissenting churches or among the non-jurors in the Church of England. For example:

the Five Mile Act of 1665 forbade expelled clergymen to come within five miles of any incorporated town or of any place where they had been ministers . . . . The occasion was the Great Plague of 1665 which reduced the population of London by twenty per cent. Along with the more affluent part of the population a good number of clergymen fled London and deserted their flocks. Their places in the care of the sick, in burials and services, were taken by volunteering Nonconformists. This outrage which illuminated somewhat too glaringly where the common man in distress found bodily and spiritual help, and where not, was answered by the Five Mile Act (Hooy).

By such enactments, the Church of England was stripped of its clerical *spoudaioi*, its reformers of right and left. As Voegelin adds pointedly, "It is hardly necessary to elaborate the parallel with more recent technical perfections in the political art of destroying the substance of a people by removing its intellectual and spiritual leadership" (*Ibid*).

According to Voegelin, therefore, two conditions must be fulfilled if society is to achieve "order". Firstly, the populace must seek to be represented by mature

leaders, not ideologues. Secondly, the rulers themselves must be sufficiently wise for their task. Now any political theory needs to give some account of the principles by which the ruling group represents the society as a whole and the criteria by which the ruling group can itself be judged. Voegelin does the service of placing these matters at the heart of political philosophy. By the same token, it follows that much of his political theory will stand or fall according to the adequacy of his conception of such "political maturity". That theme will occupy us in Chapter Ten.

CHAPTER SIX  
BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY AND SOCIAL ORDER

This chapter will serve as a conclusion to the first, primarily expository, part of the thesis, and as a bridge to the second part, in which Voegelin's significance for political theology will be discussed by way of the consideration of certain key theoretical problems. Since the political theology referred<sup>n)</sup> to is Christian, and since such theology typically relies heavily on the Hebrew Scriptures, Voegelin's treatment of the Jewish and Christian literature is of fundamental importance for us. In Chapter Four, theology was discussed as one among other modes of symbolic discourse. Both Voegelin and the political theologians, however, hold that religious experience and its primary symbolic articulations (mainly, but not only, literary) are prior to theology and constitutive of it (e.g. Gutierrez, 1973: 11).<sup>1</sup>

A preliminary digression is necessary in order to explain the discrepancy between Voegelin's systematic account of virtually the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures and his widely scattered, rather piecemeal, discussions of the Christian Scriptures and later Christian literature.<sup>2</sup>

Voegelin gave one explanation as early as 1953, when he wrote to Alfred Schutz,

essentially my concern with Christianity has no religious grounds at all. It is simply that the traditional treatment of the history of philosophy and particularly of political ideas recognizes antiquity and modernity, while the 1500 years of Christian thought and Christian politics are treated as a kind of hole in the evolution of mankind (Opitz & Sebba, 1981: 449).

In other words, Voegelin insisted that he was a philosopher of politics and of history, not a Christian apologist. Whereas the Hebrew Scriptures both inspire and reflect an intelligibly evolving political society, and therefore merit comprehensive consideration within Voegelin's terms of reference, the Christian Scriptures emerge apart from any single coherent political order. Voegelin's discussion of the Christian Scriptures accordingly concentrates on those points where he considers it to be maximally differentiated, notably in the Gospel of John and the Pauline letters.

"Christendom", of course, did later come to constitute a unique kind of polity. But two factors together constitute the second reason why Voegelin did not undertake a sequel to *Israel and Revelation* based on Christendom.

Firstly, as Voegelin himself explained to those who criticized him on this score (Sandoz, 1982: 201), the virtually infinite body of source materials is quite beyond the power of any one person to analyze.

The second factor is more complex. Voegelin originally intended the first three volumes of *Order and History* (as they now stand) to be followed by three further volumes (OH I: x):

- IV. *Empire and Christianity*
- V. *The Protestant Centuries*
- VI. *The Crisis of Western Civilization.*

But, as he later explained (OH IV: 1 seq.), this project broke down. When conscientiously studied, the materials exploded his original conception of history as "a meaningful course of events on a straight line of time". Such a unilinear history itself turned out to be a cosmological symbol of the type that tends to legitimate some existing order: it was "a millennial constant in continuity from its origins in the Sumerian and Egyptian



societies, through its cultivation by Israelites and Christians, right into the 'philosophies of history' of the nineteenth century A.D." (*Ibid*: 7).

Voegelin's "failure" to consider Christianity more comprehensively, therefore, signifies no depreciation of its intrinsic truth or historical importance, but only manifests his scholarly single-mindedness.

### The Nature of Scripture

In his important, though so far unpublished, essay "The Beginning and the Beyond", Voegelin offers two complementary descriptions of the nature of "Scripture":

Scripture is a stratum of meaning superimposed on a body of Israelite and Judaic literature by the organizers of the *Book of the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings*. . . . [Later], a collection of early Christian writings is canonized as the New Testament, complementing as the new Scripture the older one that now becomes the Old Testament, with all the attendant problems of verbal inspiration and literalist deformation. The organization of the second Scripture had the same pragmatic motives as that of the first one: it was a protective device against the competing wisdoms in the surrounding ecumenic-imperial society, especially against the Gnostic movements within Christianity (HOOG).

The point of understanding "Scripture" as such a "stratum of meaning" is seen in a distinction Voegelin draws between "pragmatic" and "paradigmatic" narrative (OH I: 121-26). There is "no reason to doubt" that scriptural narrative has a pragmatic core: nevertheless,

the events are not experienced in a pragmatic context of means and ends, as actions leading to results in the intramundane realm of political power, but as acts of obedience to, or defection from, a revealed will of God. . . . When experienced in this manner, the course of events becomes sacred history, while the single events become paradigms of God's way with man in this world (*Ibid*: 121).

The two kinds of narrative have different criteria of truth. Original accounts can be reworked, dramatically shaped, to reveal their paradigmatic essence: "a pragmatic historian, to be sure, would regret any such transformations as a falsification of sources, but the writer of sacred history will understand them as an increase of truth". If the sources resist ready reshaping, whole bodies of tradition may be recast: so, for example, *Deuteronomy* "is not a 'fifth' book of Moses, but a huge paraenesis appended to the Tetrateuch", summarizing "the paradigmatic lesson of Exodus, Desert, and Covenant as it was understood shortly before the end of the Kingdom of Judah" (*Ibid*: 122).

Pragmatic and paradigmatic history are not *conflicting* genres, as if Israelite history were written "in order to confuse pragmatic historians who wryly assign a date to Moses while suspending judgment with regard to his existence". In fact, it is precisely the sacred history which constitutes Israel as a people even on the pragmatic plane: for "the order of history emerges from the history of order" (OH I: ix). Those who

lived the symbolism of Sheol, Desert, and Canaan, who understood their wanderings as the fulfilment of a divine plan, were formed by this experience into a Chosen People. Through the leap in being, that is, through the discovery of transcendent being as the source of order in man and society, Israel constituted itself as the carrier of a new truth in history (*Ibid*: 123).

It was this "leap", this imbuing of experience with a new and special meaning, which distinguished Israel from the surrounding "cosmological" empires; and it is this awareness of special meaning which produces a "Scripture" that is richer than the sum of its source materials. In other words, Israel's *faith* is constitutive of both its very existence and its historical self-articulation.

If one understands Scripture in this way, it follows that the interpreter's primary duty is to take seriously

*the text as the redactors leave it.* Voegelin does this in three main ways.

Firstly, and not surprisingly, he criticizes the methodology of the Wellhausen school, according to which "whatever meaning is found in the narrative had to be found on the level of the 'sources' distinguished by literary criticism": so that Martin Noth, for example, can suggest that the integration of the discernible sources into the Pentateuch is "a purely literary labour, adding nothing by way of new materials" (QH I: 151-52, citing Noth). According to Voegelin, source analysis becomes destructive where it implies that the integral text contains no units of meaning which cut across the sources (*Ibid*: 122, 154, 389-90). What is "added", on the contrary, is decisive: the "symbolism which articulates the experience of a people's order - of the ontologically real order of Israel's existence in historical form" (*Ibid*: 156).<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, Voegelin disallows any attempt to determine the intention of the text on the basis of factors extrinsic to it. Thus, he deprecates the scholarly tendency (e.g. in the work of Mowinckel) to invoke the "New Year Festival" as a phenomenon which explains the "Imperial Psalms" (QH I: 282-303), even though the content (indeed, the very existence) of the cult had to be inferred from the Psalms it purported to explain.

This circle cannot be broken through reference to other sources that would unequivocally attest the existence of the festival, since the silence of the sources made the circular assumption necessary in the first place (*Ibid*: 287-88).

What concerns Voegelin is that resort to the cult is a mere positivist device unless one also penetrates into the order of which the cult is a function. At best, the hypothesis offers only a classification, not a theoretical explanation.

Thirdly, and predictably, Voegelin dismisses all positivist reductions of the narrative. For example, he points out that Moses is little heard of in sources pre-dating the end of the Davidic Empire. The Moses traditions, though never lost, "entered the foreground of symbolism only through the prophetic revolt in the crisis of the ninth century" when what Voegelin calls the *imitatio Mosis* required legitimation. So,

the picture of a Pharaoh negotiating with the leaders of workers on a building project about their release is too improbable to be accepted as historical. The story makes good sense, however, if we ascribe it to the prophetic legend. For in Moses facing the Pharaoh and calling on him to obey the will of Yahweh, we can recognize the paradigm of the prophet facing the king of Israel (*Ibid*: 384-85).

Although the face-to-face negotiations are presumably legendary, the substance behind the imagery is indispensable. The Israelites could not have emigrated without some negotiation between their leaders and the Egyptian officials. The legend testifies to the most important point, that the emigration manifests a conflict between Yahwism and the principles of Pharaonic order.

This explanation is different from positivist explanations in that it attempts to do interpretative justice to the text itself: as Voegelin sums up, "in search of the substance we must beware of the positivistic trap to substitute more probable pragmatic events for the legendary ones" (*Ibid*: 385). To fall into that trap would abandon the text without gaining substantial meaning in return.

The above account by no means implies that there is some single "meaning" of Scripture. On the contrary, "that meaning did not appear at a definite point of time to be preserved once for all, but emerged gradually and was frequently revised under the pressure of pragmatic events" (*Ibid*: 134). The various sources contain stratified meanings and traditions, which are overlaid by

the meaning embodied in the final redaction but which also retain a relative autonomy, such as the "memoirs of an unknown author on the reign of David and the accession of Solomon" (*Ibid*: 146). Different centres of meaning co-exist and illumine each other. For example, only with the constitution of Israel through the Covenant and the settlement in Canaan, is the full meaning of the *Genesis* narrative made clear; but conversely, *Genesis* contains a universalist strand which ought to inhibit Israel's degeneration into a society devoted only to its own expansion (*Ibid*: 140-41, citing *Genesis* 18:18).

Likewise, according to "The Gospel and Culture", a "Gospel" does not have a single meaning. It is "neither a poet's work of dramatic art [pace R. M. Frye] nor a historian's biography of Jesus, but the symbolization of a divine movement that went through the person of Jesus into society and history". The Gospels' revelatory movement runs on three planes. Firstly, there is the personal drama of Jesus, especially the drama of his consciousness of his identity and mission; secondly, there is the social drama in which he is variously acknowledged, followed, and resisted; and thirdly, there is the historical drama in which a "millennial movement" responds to his life, articulating its meaning in symbols which were more or less at hand - Son of God, Messiah, the Kingdom of God, and so forth (Voegelin, 1971a: 92-93). To understand the event of Jesus properly, one must appropriate all three planes of meaning.

Now that Voegelin's approach to the Bible has been outlined, we shall discuss in this chapter three topics (of which the third will be given the fullest treatment) to represent his interpretations. They are:

- the Exodus, as event and as symbol
- the notions of kingship and kingdom in Israel
- prophetic radicalism and its relationship to civilizational order.

These topics are selected with a threefold purpose. They show how Voegelin supports his general philosophical position with textual analysis; they are all themes at the heart of contemporary political theology, and will therefore illustrate his significance for such theology; they will exemplify his account of how "pneumatic differentiations" are relevant to problems of social order.<sup>4</sup>

#### Exodus as Event and as Symbol<sup>5</sup>

Voegelin sees the Exodus as the central one of the three acts of divine creation by which meaning is wrested from meaninglessness: "the world emerges from Nothing, Israel from the Sheol of Egypt, and the promised land from the Desert" (OH I: 135). The Exodus is the "experiential nucleus" from which other historical meanings ramify. For example, the patriarchal history is constructed largely to show how Israel originally came to be enslaved in Egypt (*Ibid*: 136-37).

By the "Exodus event", Voegelin means the action which begins "when God hears the cry of his people and reveals himself to Moses" and is completed with the revelation from Sinai, a revelation which "is not a moral catechism but the body of fundamental rules which constitute a people under God" (*Ibid*: 415, 414).<sup>6</sup>

The Exodus narrative is a highly organized literary unit. Thus, the encounter in which God overcomes the resistance of Moses is balanced by the scenes in which Moses breaks down the resistance of Pharaoh: and the mutual presence of God and Moses in the thornbush dialogue (*Exodus*: 3: 11-14; 4: 10-12) expands into the mutual presence of God and the people in the Covenant (*Ibid*: 407):

The divine presence assures man that he can fulfil a command he feels beyond his human powers, and the

fulfilment is the "token" of the presence. . . . There is no revelation to Moses as a historical event unless through the experience of revelation Moses becomes the servant of Yahweh; and no people will be brought forth from Egypt, unless in the act of leaving Egypt it enters the service of Yahweh at the mountain (*Ibid*: 417).

The Covenant, however, is not simply a "happy ending". It begins a "perpetual rhythm of defection from, and return to, the order of human existence in the present under God". Even after the apparent denouement of the "Exodus as event",

the resistance to the order continues in the new historical form. History, in the sense of the perpetual task to regain the order under God from the pressure of mundane existence, has only begun (*Ibid*: 418).

In Voegelin's view, the Exodus event is a paradigm of the perennial spiritual drama. It is structured by the divine call and the human response of acceptance or resistance. The drama which unfolds within the consciousness of Moses is prior to, and quite as essential as, the public drama of the people's release. In turn, the people's release from oppression takes its primary significance from the establishment of the *Perith*, the Covenant, to which it leads; for it is in order to illuminate the meaning of the Covenant that the "unknown master" has composed the drama in the light of the historical sources (*Ibid*: 418-27).

For Voegelin, therefore, the term "exodus", as well as denoting a specific event in Israel's history, becomes a technical term for a *category* of events:

When a society gains a new insight into the true order of personal and social existence, and when it will abandon the larger society of which it is a part when it gains this insight, this constitutes an exodus. . . . Whenever a new insight into order is gained, there is always the question whether to emigrate from the present order into a situation in

which the new order can become socially dominant and relevant for the society that has gained the insight (Voegelin, 1968b: 32).

On this view, Abraham's departure from Ur is the first exodus, Israel's deliverance from Egypt is the second (*Ibid*). But they are the first and second of many.<sup>7</sup>

Israel's exodus from Egypt originates in the soul of Moses, for to be such a person as can hear the divine command is to become at once the servant of Yahweh not of Pharaoh, and the representative of a *people* which belongs not Yahweh, not Pharaoh. The theophany to Moses therefore provokes the clash between Israel and the Pharaonic cosmological order. The clash drives the entire subsequent action: "the emigration of Israel means more than the loss of a working force: the Egyptian ruler has been spiritually demoted and must surrender his position as Son of God to Israel" (*Ibid*: 391-92).

Now, according to Voegelin, the process beginning with Israel's "exodus from cosmological civilization" cannot be fulfilled until there is a further "exodus of Israel from itself". Israel was not to become merely one independent nation among others, but was to be "the transformer of all nations into herself", was to "carry the good news of salvation to the ends of the earth", because the "creator-god has been transformed into the Redeemer (*goel*) for all mankind" (OH IV: 26-27). Unfortunately, though, one aspect of the Exodus from Egypt, the achievement of political autonomy, imposed a "mortgage" on this transcendent insight. For the political gain, "traumatically aggravated by the stresses and strains of pragmatic existence", locked Israel into its own sense of separateness so that "the universalist implications of the experience were never successfully explicated within Israelite history".

The spiritual meaning of the exodus from civilization was well understood but nevertheless remained inseparable from the concrete Exodus from



Egypt; the Kingdom of God could never quite separate from Canaan; the great original revelation remained so overwhelmingly concrete that its spiritual renewals had to assume the form of additions to the Instructions; and the word of God to mankind through Israel became the sacred scripture of a particular ethnico-religious community (OH I: 164, cf. also 491).

Our concern in quoting this passage is with the meaning of "exodus", not with the justice of Voegelin's severe estimate of the spiritual limitations of ancient Judaism. Nevertheless, it must be noted that he finds the fulfilment of "exodus" only in Christian universalism, which was free of the "mortgage" of separatist national consciousness (OH I: 164; OH IV: 27).<sup>e</sup>

To identify the nature of this fulfilment, Voegelin quotes from St. Augustine: "They begin to depart who begin to love. Many there are who depart and do not know it. For their walk of departure is a movement of the heart. And yet they depart from Babylon". Voegelin deduces from this saying that

the existential tension of departure, the walk of departure, is a movement of the heart - this is the definition of exodus. The problem is reduced to what today we would call a philosophy of existence (Voegelin, 1968b: 33-34).<sup>e</sup>

Voegelin's understanding of exodus symbolism is coherent and enlightening, but open to criticism. He writes, "There was something of the liberator in the man who led his people from servitude to political independence; but he was not an Israelite Garibaldi, for the people, in order to be freed by him from the bondage of Pharaoh, had to enter the service of Yahweh" (OH I: 389). Now, it is true that the biblical narrative envisages no political liberation apart from religious conversion. But Voegelin never states what is equally fundamental: that Israel's spiritual allegiance to Yahweh forbids its continued tolerance of Egyptian oppression. Voegelin

splits the symbolic unity of the Exodus narrative in one manner, while rightly refusing to split it in another.

The narrative itself, however, rules out either mode of the split. According to *Exodus* 1, Egypt's oppression of Israel is fundamentally economic and social. Even the denial of Israel's right to worship is portrayed not as "religious" intolerance but as a mode of economic oppression: worship is forbidden in order that Israel might have no respite from labour (*Exodus* 5: 3-9). Any liberation, therefore, must itself embrace the socio-economic realm. In *Exodus* 6: 2-3, for example, we are told that Yahweh had appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but had not revealed his name to them. Verses 6-7 are then constructed as an *inclusio* in which two complementary statements, of God's identity and Israel's knowledge of it, are linked with the liberating action:

Say therefore to the people of Israel, "I am Yahweh, and I will bring you out of the people of Israel, and I will deliver you from bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment, and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am Yahweh your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians". (cf. also, *Exodus* 20:2, in which the identity of God as liberator is said to underpin the Decalogue itself).<sup>10</sup>

It would, one might say, have been a different god that took the side of Egypt. Nor can Israel "know" Yahweh apart from the recognition of his favour in this concrete act. God is enigmatically revealed to Moses from the thornbush (*QH I*: 405-12): what is clearly revealed is the mission entrusted to Moses: Moses is a paradigmatic figure precisely by fulfilling the mission given him - not just any mission, but that of confronting the oppressor.<sup>11</sup>

In writing "the spiritual meaning of the exodus was well understood but nevertheless remained inseparable from the concrete Exodus from Egypt", Voegelin seems to

regard the unified nature of the symbol as regrettable. To use his characteristic term, the symbol is "compact", in that it does not distinguish the spiritual essence of the event from the political fate of Israel. Israel's insistence on the specificity of the historical action carried out in its favour inhibited recognition of the symbol's universal applicability. Any attempt to reserve God's favour to a particular tribal group would certainly misappropriate the symbol; and one sees that it is possible for the Exodus narrative to serve as an aetiology of anti-Egyptian prejudice. But the unity of the symbol is also its very point. Other peoples than Israel are oppressed: but the necessary universalizing of the symbol must always refuse to disengage spiritual from historically immanent liberation.

But Voegelin makes exactly this disengagement. He describes Augustine's formulation not as a legitimate internalization, but as the "definition" of the symbol, though the formulation itself embodies no such claim to be exhaustive. In fact, it is remarkable that Voegelin should speak of "definition" in this way, since he gave so much of his whole scholarly endeavour to resisting such petrifications of a living symbols. Suddenly, faced with a symbol which is archetypal for the entire Hebrew and Christian Scripture, he abstracts from its actual usage and the richness of its connotations: for to *define* "exodus" as a movement of the heart implies that it adds nothing to the symbol "conversion". It is striking that Voegelin is least convincing at the point where he drifts from the mooring of his own best theoretical insights. And the further question arises, why his failure occurs in this specific instance.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, to use the phrase "emigration from the present order" as an equivalent to "exodus" emasculates the biblical symbol. The prior "inner emigration", to be sure, may (or may not) lead to an external departure from

the deficient society. But emigration does not of itself challenge the society one abandons, whereas it is essential to the biblical event that, by the divine power, Israel confronts and thwarts (without of course, overthrowing) Egypt.

It is instructive to compare Voegelin's approach at this point with that of Walter Brueggemann (1978: 11-27). Brueggemann shows that the two experiential strands of religious conversion and political liberation are inextricable. For what must be challenged, the "imperial reality", is itself a unity forged between "the religion of static triumphalism" and "the politics of oppression and exploitation".

The programme of Moses is not the freeing of a little band of slaves as an escape from the empire, though that is important enough, especially if you happen to be in that little band. Rather, his work is nothing less than an assault on the consciousness of the empire, aimed at . . . the dismantling of the empire both in its social practices and in its mythic pretensions (*Ibid*: 18-19).

Brueggemann here does justice to the Voegelinian insight (that the Exodus symbolizes Israel's "leap in being"), while being more faithful to the violent drama of Egypt's discomfiture. Thus, for Voegelin the plague sequence, embodying as it does the struggle of Moses and Aaron with Pharaoh's ineffectual magicians, represents the struggle between the symbolic complexes of darkness and light (*OH I*: 385-87). But Brueggemann contrasts the complaint of Israel, which when heard by God (*Exodus* 2: 23-25) sets the whole liberation in motion, with the futile cry of lamentation at the death of the firstborn (the ones born to rule) uttered by Pharaoh and the Egyptians in *Exodus* 12: 30. By a grim irony, "the self-sufficient and impervious regime is reduced to the role of a helpless suppliant" (Brueggemann, 1978: 22). Similarly, Voegelin refers only in passing (*OH I*: 205, 392) to the Song of Moses (*Exodus* 15): but Brueggemann

demonstrates that the doxology of the song is inseparable from its polemic, as the elated repetition of the name of the Lord also redefines social perceptions; Yahweh (and emphatically not Pharaoh) "will reign for ever and ever".

What divides Brueggemann from Voegelin is not simply a matter of emphasis. To Voegelin, the substance of the Exodus is specifically not its socio-political aspect, but is the leap in being by which the people come to live "in the present under God" (OH I; 389, 417). Life under God is contrasted with life within the cosmological world-view, just as it will later be contrasted with life under an over-dogmatized interpretation of Torah (Ibid: 364-65).<sup>13</sup>

One can avoid either splitting or conflating the substance and the circumstances of the narrative by following Jacques Maritain in recognizing the socio-political liberation of Israel as an *infravalent end*. As Maritain explains, the "good of civil life" is both an ultimate end in a given order and is subordinated to an absolute end (so, "infravalent"). The infravalent end has a relative autonomy (Maritain, 1973: 134, 176). It must not be bypassed or neglected in a search for the unmediated absolute end, since the first Great Commandment is not separable from the second. To accept social practices which deny human freedom and dignity, practices summed up as "bondage" (Exodus 20: 2), is *itself* a failure to "live in the present under God". (The people's protest to Moses in the desert, which incident is also "paradigmatic history", dramatizes just this failure: cf. Exodus 14: 10-13; 17: 2-7.)

In terms of the typology sketched in "The Gospel and Culture", Voegelin, by stressing the interior dimension of the Exodus *over against* its historical specificity (as understood by the biblical community), does justice only to the third of its "planes of meaning".

Kingship and Kingdom in Israel'<sup>4</sup>

The conquest of Canaan is the third act of "the drama of divine creation", which "wrests meaning from the meaningless": "the world emerges from Nothing, Israel from the Sheol of Egypt, and the promised land from the Desert" (OH I: 134). The establishment of the Israelites in Canaan, and especially the subsequent foundation of the Kingdom of Israel, may therefore be considered a *fulfilment* of the Exodus. But in military terms the infiltration (rather than the "conquest") of Canaan was precarious, constantly under threat from Philistine attack, especially because of the lack of coherence among the tribes. The conquest was completed, "or rather it became an effective conquest at all, only through the acceptance of kingship and the successful conclusion of the Philistine wars" (*Ibid*: 177).<sup>15</sup> Not surprisingly, then, the foundation of the kingdom is "the motivating centre of Israelite historiography", just as the concern with political history ceases abruptly at the point where the two kingdoms disappear from the scene (*Ibid*: 178-79).

However, though the political narrative breaks off at the fall of Jerusalem the work of redaction (notably, that of the Deuteronomist) continued for more than two centuries (*Ibid*: 177-79). In the *final* structure of the Hebrew Testament, the foundation of the kingdom is "completely overlaid by the motivations of the Mosaic Covenant". The kings' pragmatic achievement, for example, came to be minimized as stress was laid on their fidelity or infidelity to the Covenant (in terms of their personal morality, their temptations to syncretism, their practice of social injustice). Conversely, the pre-monarchical "so-called conquest" of Canaan was inflated to heroic proportions. Voegelin's summary is neat:

In the sequence of historical events the Covenant precedes the Kingdom; in the sequence of motivations of the narrative the Kingdom precedes the Covenant;

in the content of the narrative itself the Covenant dominates the kingdom (*Ibid*: 179).

Voegelin accounts for this complexity:

Under the threat of extinction at the hands of the Philistines, the organization of the people under a monarchy was understood as the fulfilment of the task imposed by the Covenant. But as soon as the monarchy was established, and had adjusted itself to the internal and external exigencies of politics, it became obvious that the new social order did not correspond to the intentions of the Covenant at all. Hence, only with the [adverse] reaction to the monarchy began the intense interest in Moses and the Instructions which ultimately caused the Kingdom to appear as a great aberration (OH I: 180).

In Voegelin's view, therefore, the scriptural ambivalence towards the monarchy is not to be explained principally in terms of conflicting royalist and anti-royalist sources (though of course, he recognizes these), but by the self-defeating nature of the monarchy itself (*Ibid*: 215-18). If kingship failed in its pragmatic purpose because of its futile and catastrophic opposition to stronger empires, the prophets stood vindicated. But if military success and political consolidation seemed to fulfil the promise of Canaan, such necessary concomitant measures as conscription or royal marriage alliances with pagans compromised the Covenant order, so that Israel "re-entered the Sheol of civilizations" (*Ibid*: 142). For instance, the imperial ambitions of Solomon's Kingdom led it to adopt some of the institutional forms of Egypt and Babylon (*Ibid*: 258, 313, 316-22).

It was gradually realized, then, that the kingship was in principle a recession from Covenant order, "while the carriership of meaning, running parallel with it, [was] being transferred to the prophets" (*Ibid*: 142). What is more, even the worldly achievement carried within itself the seeds of its own dissolution. The united kingdom seemed to represent Israel's glorious destiny. But the fact that Israel regained its independence from Judah

after the death of Solomon demonstrates that the unification was not *experienced* as the fulfilment of Israelite history. Yet worse, the Exodus itself was annulled, as it were, as Solomon impressed slave labour from conquered tribes, and even put the Chosen People itself to forced labour "for the unproductive purpose of building the Temple" (*Ibid*: 259).<sup>16</sup> Finally, "in a symbolic counter-movement to the Exodus under the leadership of Moses, the last defenders of Jerusalem, carrying Jeremiah with them against his will, returned to the Sheol of Egypt to die" (*Ibid*: 114).

Voegelin draws an uncompromising and significant inference from the poignant story. What is revealed in history is,

mankind striving for its order of existence within the world while attuning itself with the truth of being beyond the world, and gaining in the process not a substantially better order within the world but an increased understanding of the gulf that lies between immanent existence and the transcendent truth of being. Canaan is as far away today as it has always been in the past (*Ibid*: 129).

It was only the "the crisis of mundane existence", "when the *raison d'etre* of Israel was at stake" which enabled the biblical historians, prophets and codemakers to clarify the true meaning of Israel's existence (*Ibid*: 328); and it is this clarification, this "leap of being", which leaves "a paradigmatic trail of symbols through history" and constitutes Israel's significance. As Voegelin sums up, "it looks as if it had been the destiny of Israel, during the short five centuries of its pragmatic existence, to create an offspring of living symbols and then to die" (*Ibid*: 314-15).

This discussion explains why Voegelin attached so little weight to the external liberation accomplished by the Exodus. The fruit of liberation, Canaan, was itself



an ambiguous reality as there occurred the "translation of a transcendent aim into a historical *fait accompli*" (*Ibid*: 143-44).

To understand Voegelin's emphasis, however, is not to justify it. No transcendent aim can be unequivocally consummated within history, no new social order can be immune from subsequent decay. But the achievement of liberation does not thereby count for nothing. It is true, as Bernhard Anderson notes, (McKnight, 1978: 74), that "Israel" is primarily a sacral term, designating not a nation but a *people*; and the people's destiny is not merely the preservation of its "national sovereignty". But Anderson does not suggest that the "people" is *discontinuous* with the "nation". When Voegelin separates Israel's destiny and "meaning" from the course of its political existence (by saying that the carrying of meaning is entirely transferred from kings to prophets), he condemns the pragmatic history to futility. Historical events are then, at best, an *occasion* for the gaining of spiritual insight. The tension between spiritual and temporal has hardened into an opposition (McKnight, 1978: 74-76).

In fact, as will be seen in the next section, Voegelin criticizes the prophets precisely for dissolving the same tension, by their failure to acknowledge the exigencies of political leadership. By the same token, political achievement deserves his own respect: the "historical *fait accompli*" of the Exodus ought to be valued for its inherently emancipatory character, as well as for its embodiment, however imperfectly, of a transcendent aim.

#### Prophetic Radicalism and Civilization

Voegelin has clarified the acute tension between the demands of Israel's political life and of its transcendent orientation (a tension which is fully articulate

only in the most spiritually sensitive, the prophets and the biblical redactors). If, however, he holds that political leadership could not conceivably be conformed, even imperfectly, to Covenant order, so that the Covenant had no possible point of intersection with politics but was effective only as a principle of judgment on all politics indiscriminately, he has decisively split the two realms. Our examination of his treatment of the Exodus and the Israelite monarchy has indicated the problem: what scope is there for the social enactment of transcendently inspired insight? It will now be further discussed, with reference firstly to the Hebrew prophets and secondly to subsequent expressions of prophetic consciousness, especially the dominical "sermons" in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

From Jeremiah's "Temple Sermon", Voegelin infers that there exist "two Israels" in conflict: that which was identical with the political community "organized under the Torah as interpreted by the King, his officers and priests", and the "entirely different community that lived under the Decalogue as interpreted by Jeremiah". But the court and ruling class "while rejecting the word of the prophet, did not dare to attack on principle an authority on which they depended for their own legitimacy"; and the prophets, even while pronouncing judgment, "hope for a miracle of conversion" to avert disaster. The conflict, though it is so fundamental as to allow no compromise, is therefore contained within a single community (*Ibid*: 434).

#### *The Civilizational Rejection of Prophetic Truth*

The first principle of order is that of the Deuteronomic Torah (*Ibid*: 372-79). Moses, "the author of a people", "had to become the author of a book". Voegelin acknowledges that the Torah, the "magnificent sum of the Sinaitic tradition", is a "spiritual treasure". But as

there occurs "the contraction of the universal potentialities of the Sinaitic revelation into the law of an ethnic-religious community", the Torah itself serves a diminished function, as "the instrument used by the sages to suppress prophetism". Voegelin cites *Deuteronomy* 30: 11-14, which insists that the commandment given to Israel is not "hidden" or "far off", but is "in your mouth and in your heart that you may do it". One might expect Voegelin to acclaim this saying as an authentic articulation of the leap in being, by which Israel recognizes that every person lives in immediacy under God and is therefore capable of receiving and discerning divine truth. But Voegelin accepts G. von Rad's alternative interpretation, that the text presumes the divine commandment to be manifest to all, to require no spiritual sensitivity for its discernment, and therefore that human *search* for the will of God is superfluous. On the basis of this exegesis, Voegelin writes,

No longer will there be a soul in anguish like Saul's when God is silent; no longer will there be a trembling in fear that existence in truth might be missed. . . . The word as communicated is now within history, and the eternity of the divine will has become the everlasting presence of the Torah. The Law, thus, far from being the burden it is frequently imagined to be on the part of Christian thinkers, is on the contrary the great liberation from the tension of existence in the presence of God (*Ibid*; 374).

This last sentence is obviously ironical: Voegelin could not think release from the tension a true liberation. Once again, he insists that he does not wish to depreciate the Deuteronomic Torah: though it has its dubious aspects, it is a "remarkable recovery of Yahwist order when held against the practice of Judah under Manasseh" (*Ibid*: 377), and it preserves the Jewish post-exilic community against the complete destruction which might otherwise have followed the people's dispersion. But it constitutes, however excusably, a regression from spiritual truth. (One might say he considers it to be "theology".) If we assume that he expresses himself with

care, we must accept that he thinks the Torah to be itself a false liberation from metaxic tension and not merely the occasion for such a liberation.

The prophets, philosophers, and saints who can translate the order of the spirit into the practice of conduct without institutional support and pressure, are rare. For its survival in the world, therefore, the order of the spirit has to rely on a fanatical belief in the symbols of a creed more often than on the *fides caritate formata* - though such reliance, if it becomes socially predominant, is apt to kill the order it is supposed to preserve (*Ibid*: 376-77).

To speak, as does Voegelin, of "fanatical belief" clearly constitutes depreciation even if he disclaims any such intention. The attempt to temper his criticism seems to be a concession to Israel's precarious political standing, because of which Israel's very survival, its capacity to transmit any of its experience of the divine required "a fierce adherence to the collective identity, however much damaged pragmatically and flattened spiritually" (*Ibid*: 378).<sup>17</sup>

What Voegelin stresses (drawing especially on the career of Jeremiah) is the vehemence with which adherents of the Deuteronomic Torah reject the superior prophetic truth, because their reliance on the "book" stands opposed to the prophet's arduous experience of faith. Martin Buber points out, however, in a discussion of *Deuteronomy* 30, that the opposition to any such degeneration not only came from the prophets, but is also expressed in the written Torah itself, and by the rabbinic interpreters: (Buber, 1951: 51-55). The Torah is not "a separate *objectivum*": the divine voice "is always present or at least its sound is heard fading away". Therefore one cannot reduce Torah to a law "which a person had merely to adhere to as such, rather than to comprehend its truth with every effort of the soul and then to realize it". The Pharisees' doctrine of *lishmah* itself constitutes a rejection of verbal fundamentalism:

for the Torah is not something independent of God, but bestows life "only to one who receives it for its own sake in its living actuality, that is, in its association with its Giver and for His sake" (*Ibid*: 57-58, 92-93).

Thus the conflict is one between two views of spiritual order, not between a "spiritual" party and a party of pragmatists. But Voegelin compares the conflict between Jeremiah and Jehoiakim (*Jeremiah* 36: 1-24) with that between Socrates and the Athenian authorities, writing of "the mutual death sentences when the *order of God* is about to disengage itself from the *order of man*" (*OH I*: 436, emphasis added). It is true that in the scriptural narrative the "order of man" (here the court, the priests and the false prophets) is by definition corrupt, opposed to the truth which Jeremiah represents. But Voegelin takes the incident to express "essential processes of experience and symbolization", to be a paradigm of "the conflict between the historical order of society and the divinely revealed order".

To speak here of "conflict" rather than his favourite word "tension" is to deny that divine and civilizational order can (even provisionally) cohere, and postulates the "order of man", the "historical order of society", as wholly a realm of evil, of resistance to divine order, rather than as the sphere of the metaxic struggle of good against evil. Even the possibility of "miraculous conversion" is foregone in favour of the paradigmatic "mutual death sentences".

#### *The Prophets' Abandonment of Practical Political Reason*

Turning now to the second principle of order, we shall find that Voegelin does not straightforwardly endorse the perspective of prophetic consciousness. If, in his view, reality is split in such a way that pragmatic politics inevitably embodies a rejection of the spiritual, one

might expect him also to consign the prophets to political irrelevance, however reluctantly. To test this hypothesis, we shall consider two representative clashes of principle which emerge from the prophets' challenge to a wider society: the first concerns their attack on social injustice, the second their demand that military leaders trust in the Lord.

The prophets had a double task. They had to recall Israel from any adherence to foreign gods (QH I: 366-22), and they had to guard against Yahwist obedience being reduced from a communal spiritual fidelity to a mere external observance (*Ibid*: 429).

Voegelin argues that their task was hampered by the character of the Decalogue itself (*Ibid*: 431-47). Because this is spoken by God its specific injunctions are implicitly concentrated in the single command to "Listen to my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk consistently in the way that I command you". Even otherwise petty infringements of the Decalogue reveal the people's self-assertive stubbornness (*Jeremiah* 7: 23-24).

In particular, the Decalogue makes no distinction between "existential" and "normative" issues. "A positive articulation of the existential issue would have required the experience of the soul and its right order through orientation towards the invisible God". What are stated are only positive and negative commands. Therefore the spiritual meaning of a command, to which the prophets were sensitive but the people scarcely so, remained inarticulate, and the verbal form became absolute (*Ibid*: 439). Voegelin concludes that the "normative component of the decalogic constitution" was a source of evil in as much as it endowed the institutions and conduct of the people, which derived through interpretation from the Decalogue,

with the authority of divinely willed order, however much the actual institutions perverted the will of God (*Ibid*: 440).

On Voegelin's account, then, the ground shared between the communities in tension, what E. P. Sanders calls the fundamental thought-form of "covenantal nomism" (1977), turned out to impede rather than effectuate the prophets' mission. The great achievement of the prophets was their insight that "existence under God means love, humility, and righteousness of action rather than legality of conduct". They recognized that "any letter, as it externalized the spirit, was in danger of becoming a dead letter" (QH I: 440). (As we have seen from Buber, 1951: 51-55, this insight is itself shared ground!) But, in their very faithfulness to the Decalogue, the prophets were "handicapped by their inability to break through to philosophy" (QH I: 446). The failure to distinguish the normative from the existential rendered *reasoned* criticism impossible, so that the prophets could do no more than oppose their own intransigent conception of the Decalogue and its obligations to the conception of their opponents. This is why confrontation inevitably led to hostility and mutual rejection (cf. *Ibid*: 434-36, on the career of Jeremiah).<sup>19</sup>

Any absolutism prevents discrimination between fundamental and secondary issues. Accordingly, the prophets wield the Decalogue "ruthlessly", in order

to tear the web of institutions and customs, of the convenient distances which social stratification, vested interests, professional habits, and inherited positions put in a complex society between actions and their human effects, and to make visible the direct attack of man on man in situations which more laxly may be viewed as regrettable but inevitable social evils. Amos, for instance, in a magnificent short circuit of cause and effect speaks of the rich (3:10):

For they do not know how to do right,  
who store up robbery and violence in their  
palaces. (*Ibid*: 432)

Since Voegelin would not care to be regarded as an apologist for complacent materialism, he presumably regards as a spiritual gain the prophets' penetration in discerning the factor of oppression in what is "laxly" taken for granted. Yet he thinks the "magnificent" insight to be a "short-circuit": the clever oxymoron suggests that, in his view, storing up riches does not amount to robbery and violence. He thereby rejects the precise charge levelled by Amos at the rich of his society (a kind of pre-echo of the dictum associated with Proudhon, "Property is theft."). Are the social evils in truth "inevitable", or are they culpable and the fruit of corruption? Is Amos clear-sighted, or a little hysterical? For once, Voegelin's verdict is obscure.

His intention seems to be clarified when he later comments on *Micah* 2: 1-2, where the acquisition of wealth is equated with covetousness:

One might even say the prophets weakened their case, when they involved themselves in arguments about offences against decalogue injunctions, for a man could well plead that he had not committed murder or theft when he used his business acumen to increase his property at the expense of an unwise peasant who had gone into debt too easily (*Ibid*: 438).

Voegelin does not endorse the businessman's protest. He simply remarks that the prophetic *method*, of appeal to the compact Decalogue, obscures the grounds of an effective critique, namely that such actions are incompatible not with a "fundamental law" but with the existential "right order of the soul" (*Ibid*: 438-39). Voegelin is sure that the right order of the soul is, indeed, incompatible with carefree exploitation of the poor in the name of commerce. Such exploitation is wrong, and is rightly to be condemned, though not by the name of theft.

But if the prophets are justified in their attack on social injustice, Voegelin holds that elsewhere their



rejection of the mundane order is "an oddity" (*Ibid*: 446, 443-44). He cites, for example, Isaiah's attack on "phenomena of rebellious pride against Yahweh": the lofty cedars of Lebanon, the high mountains, the fashion-conscious women (2: 12-17; 3: 16, 24).

One is inclined to wonder what the servants of Yahweh wanted. . . . should the cedars of Lebanon grow only half size? and should the daughters of Zion be dowdy? It is important to realize that no prophet has ever answered a question of this kind (*Ibid*: 444).

He adds that a counter-charge would have been justified, "if the people had been able to articulate such charges at all": namely, that the prophets "had no respect for the beauty of God's creation, that they did not permit man to unfold his God-given faculties of mind and body, and that they could not distinguish between pride and joy of life" (*Ibid*). Because the prophets had not differentiated the *authentic* "tension of temporal and spiritual order", their rightful rejection of the people's mythical order involved them in mistakenly "rejecting the order of mundane existence altogether" (*Ibid*). They were, as Voegelin concludes, apparently

not only unable to see, but not even interested in finding, a way from the formation of the soul to institutions and customs they could consider compatible with the knowledge and fear of God. The attitude of the prophets is tantalizing in that it seem to violate common sense (*Ibid*: 446-47).

I make two remarks about this argument. Firstly, his notion of compactness and differentiation is of real help in locating the clash of interpretations over the Decalogue, and in accounting for its virulence. Failing to make the distinction between the existential and the normative will tend to make positions non-negotiable and differences irresolvable.<sup>20</sup>

Secondly, however, Voegelin's criticism of the prophets is surprisingly literalist. When, in the text quoted (3:16), Isaiah condemns the daughters of Zion who

are "haughty and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go", his intention is not to commend dowdiness or condemn elegance. Voegelin makes no mention of the context of Isaiah's condemnation, Yahweh's judgment on the rich because "the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?" (3: 14-15). The luxury and affectation are precisely the symptom and symbol of social disorder, over which matter Voegelin has endorsed the prophetic stance. The prophet rejects not the mundane order as such, but a particular unjust social order: and in Voegelin's own terms (following Aristotle) an unjust order is to be regarded as no "order" at all. It seems that Voegelin's distinction between the existential and the normative has here led him to misrepresent Isaiah as morbidly indignant over trivia and to overlook the genuinely existential character of the prophetic charge.<sup>21</sup>

The case may seem petty. It has been discussed here because Voegelin's seeming failure of interpretation is carried into the immediate continuation of his argument, where he deals with our second representative clash of principle, the prophets' critique of royal militarism. This is a crux in the whole corpus of Voegelin's work.

The background of this clash must be outlined. In Voegelin's estimation, the prophets' most serious problem arose from their need to clarify the historical status of Israel itself. For the universalist implications of the thornbush episode and the covenant drama, "which could be suppressed on the popular level by the fierceness of collective existence, had to loom large in the souls of solitary spiritualists tortured by the sorrow about the destiny of the Chosen People" (OH I: 430). The endless sequence of defections raised the question how far Israel could still be regarded as "My People", especially as the neighbouring empires themselves came to be seen as

instruments of Israel's chastening. The appearance of prophets "succeeding one another through the generations in opposition to the people" suggested that the problem of personal existence under Yahweh might be independent of the continued existence of the historical Israel:

Had the Kingdom of God, of necessity, to assume the form of a political Israel; and if that question should be answered in the negative, had it, of necessity, to assume the form of a politically organized people at all (*Ibid*: 430)?

The force of this last question needs to be carefully considered. The plight of Israel is paradigmatic:

when the prophets were successful to a certain degree, as they were in the revolt of Jehu, they endangered the diplomatic relations on which the survival of the country depended; and when on the other hand, the existence of the people as an organized community was threatened with annihilation, the value of a covenant with Yahweh, which included the promise of a glorious future in Canaan, became doubtful (*Ibid*: 356).

Voegelin concludes that it is "suicidal" to conceive of the "present under God" as necessarily expressed in "the institution of a small people in opposition to empires" (*Ibid*), because the political existence of such a people is so precarious. In any case, as he earlier remarks, "spiritually it became obvious that the existence or nonexistence of a Kingdom of Israel was irrelevant for the fundamental problems of a life in righteousness before the Lord" (*Ibid*: 182). And yet, the prophets insist that the divine promises can be fulfilled within the life of this small people.

In order to penetrate theoretically the difficulties inherent in this expectation, Voegelin analyses (*Ibid*: 447-57) a case where "the question what to do concretely in a situation affecting public order was not evaded".

*Isaiah's "Metastatic Faith"*

Isaiah insists to King Ahaz (7: 9) that Israel's strength lies in its trust in the Lord: "If you do not trust, you will not last". More revealing still, in Voegelin's view, is 31: 1: "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses . . . . but do not look to the Holy One of Israel and do not consult Yahweh", which Voegelin interprets ("incredible as it may sound at first hearing") as "advice to replace the army by the *ruach* of God living in the prophet" (*Ibid*: 449).<sup>22</sup>

Voegelin's crucial interpretation of Isaiah's appeal to Ahaz must be given in his own words:

the severe repression of human synergism, the reduction of man's role in the drama of history to a trusting abnegation of action, is definitely not magic in the sense of human action that intends to compel favorable action of divine forces. On the other hand, the formula "If you do not trust you will not last" carries the implication that you will last, if you trust. Isaiah's counsel does not originate in an ethic of non-violence; it is not calculated to lose the war in order to gain something more important than earthly victory but on the contrary to win the war by means more certain than an army. . . . An aura of magic undeniably surrounds the counsel: it is due to the act that the divine plan itself has been brought within the knowledge of man, in as much as Isaiah knows that God wants the survival of Judah as an organized people in pragmatic history. With that knowledge is given the trust, not in the inscrutable will of God that must be accepted however bitter it tastes . . . . but in the knowable will of God that conforms with the policies of Isaiah and the Chosen people (*Ibid*: 451).

Isaiah, thus, has "tried the impossible: to make the leap in being a leap out of existence into a divinely transfigured world beyond the the laws of mundane existence", without this transfigured world ceasing to be the world in which we live concretely. Voegelin calls this "change in the constitution of being envisaged by the prophets" *metastasis*. Things are as they are, and "the will to transform reality into something which by essence it is

not is the rebellion against the nature of things as ordained by God" (*Ibid*: 452, 453).

Voegelin also regards *Isaiah* 11: 1-9 and 2: 2-4 as metastatic prophecies. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, nations will beat swords into ploughshares and cease to learn the art of war. The order of society and history will become substantively the order of the divine glory: "government institutions and their human incumbents are no longer mentioned" (*Ibid*: 479-81).<sup>23</sup>

The Preface to *Israel and Revelation* shows how much weight Voegelin attached to his argument:

the prophetic conception of a change in the constitution of being lies at the root of our contemporary beliefs in the perfection of society, either through progress or through a communist revolution. . . . the apparent antagonists [are] revealed as brothers under the skin, as the late Gnostic descendents of the prophetic faith in a transfiguration of the world (*OH I*: xiii).

And he concludes, "Metastatic faith is one of the great sources of disorder, if not the principal one, in the contemporary world; and it is a matter of life and death for all of us to understand the phenomenon and to find remedies against it before it destroys us" (*Ibid*).

Here, then, is the second representative clash between the prophetic mind and the civil and military order. Our discussion will be restricted to the case of *Isaiah*.<sup>24</sup>

The discussion has three possible outcomes. It might be that *Isaiah* is guilty as charged, of a positive and influential deformation of faith. Secondly, the prophetic utterances might represent not a positive deformation or derailment, but only a relatively compact articulation of the nature of human dependence on divine power. Voegelin would in this case be correct to point out the undeveloped understanding embodied in the texts, but would not be justified in his use of the term

*metastasis*, which implies a definite loss of truth, rather than an incomplete advance in truth.<sup>25</sup> I shall argue for the third possibility, that Voegelin has radically misconceived the prophetic intention.

Voegelin recognizes that the conception of dependency which he criticizes in the prophets is not idiosyncratic. It pervades the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>26</sup> De Vaux points out (1961: 264) that the Deuteronomist envisages the whole history of Israel as a Holy War, fought with God at their head (cf. *Deuteronomy* 1: 30). Voegelin traces how this symbolism of God's leadership developed as the tribal society evolved into the kingdom (QH I 208-12). The "war spirit of the tribes" required an active readiness to fight when mobilized by the prophetic mouthpiece of God. This was the "Holy War", concerned only with defence, not territorial expansion. The coming of a professional soldiery meant that military policy could no longer be determined by or delegated to the charismatic spiritual leader, that military projects might well transgress the limits of the Holy War, and, most important of all, that non-soldiers became passive.

Voegelin illustrates this development by "the post-Solomonic account of the miraculous rescue of Israel from the Egyptians" (*Exodus* 14: 13-14), where the Israelites are assured, "Yahweh will fight for you and you have only to keep still". The Egyptians are indeed drowned; "and the people feared Yahweh, and they believed in Yahweh and his servant Moses" (14:31). Voegelin comments,

only when Yahweh has shown his might are they willing to believe in him. This strange passivity . . . was certainly not a civic virtue on which a government could build (*Ibid*: 211).

He adds a significant footnote. The passages, which when "discussed under the aspect of mundane existence" reflect a "dubious civic virtue", are spiritually "a compact

expression of the insight that faith has its origin not in human initiative but in a divine *gratia praeveniens*" (*Ibid*).

Now it is Voegelin, and not the biblical writer, who implies that trust in divine grace will inevitably run counter to "civic virtue". He does this in two ways. He assumes, rather than argues, that "civic virtue" (and not merely the "national interest" proclaimed by the rulers) requires the readiness for military action, and so he precludes any ethical challenge to the rulers' militaristic conception of "civic virtue" itself. Even more important, he assumes that the "spiritual" and the "mundane" levels of the narrative are of equal weight, so that *Exodus* 14 is concerned with military strategy no less than with God's gracious care for the people.

His interpretation of *Isaiah* 30: 15 and 31: 1-3 also manifests both these dubious assumptions. The "Holy One of Israel" enjoins the people to "quietness and trust". Voegelin takes this phrase to mean "a trusting abnegation of action", since any human action would reveal distrust of God's power. Therefore, "knowledge of the divine plan casts its paralyzing spell on the necessity of action in the world" (*Ibid*: 451).

Buber, however, explains the biblical notion of God's "holiness" to mean that God is distinct from the world but not withdrawn from it. Israel must imitate God, be holy as God is holy (Buber, 1949: 128-29). Assertions of God's holiness do not commit Israel to passivity, but determine *the nature of its activity*. Thus the command to "keep still", says Buber,

is not merely a negative programme, if we take it in connection with all the prophetic teaching about the right order of community life; if this order is established, *keeping still* lends the people a downright magnetic power (*Ibid*: 135-36, emphasis in original).

Keeping still has nothing to do with political passivity, but is an imitation of Yahweh who "keeps still" and looks on Israel (*Isaiah*: 18: 4, in Buber's rendering, cf. also 4: 5). When we recall that, according to the Hebrew Testament, Yahweh's stillness is compatible with passionate intervention, it becomes clear that it is faithless action that is prohibited, not action as such.

As to the alliances with Egypt or Assyria, the prophet's rejection of the them is by no means intended as a repudiation of all civic order. Kaiser notes that *Isaiah* 30: 15-17, by means of its allusion to 31: 1 seq., contrasts the purpose and the result of the proposed alliance, "revealing that the policy of strength which failed to consult the will of Yahweh was in fact a policy of weakness" (Kaiser, 1974: 296-97). *Isaiah* 31: 3 has a double antithesis which supposes a unity between spiritual and military levels of discourse, but firmly subordinates the military level: "the Egyptians are men and not God", and "their horses are flesh and not spirit". It is God's *ruach* that constitutes life, and it is because a *reliance* on "men" and "flesh" would inherently reject "God" and "spirit" that *Isaiah's* urgent counsel is given. Contrary to Voegelin's claim, the prophet does not assume that the divine *ruach* can replace the army (*QH I*: 449), but warns against the opposite destruction of synergy, any pretence that the army can replace the *ruach*. For any covenant with Assyria or Egypt would be a repudiation of the Covenant. In the name of "security" it would bring only subservience. Still worse, Israel would again be obliged to accept foreign gods and cults (that is, in Voegelinian terms, to accept an overt regression to cosmological religion), as well as to support the monstrous military ventures of the empires (Heschel, 1969: 71-75.<sup>27</sup>)

For the prophets, therefore, any "civic virtue" which repudiated Yahwist order (which is at once spiritual and



political) would be futile. Voegelin's harsh judgment on Isaiah's counsel is rooted in *his own* polarization of "mundane existence" and "spiritual existence". Existence in the world, including confrontation with the grimmest pragmatic necessities, is not inherently unspiritual. Conversely, the prophets' determination to introduce the level of spirit into pragmatic decisions is not a "leap out of existence". *Ruach* must govern the army, or God ceases to be Lord of the army: but the claim that it can *replace* the army is Voegelin's interpretation of the prophet and not the authentic prophetic word.

Voegelin is also unreasonable in accusing Isaiah of trusting in a divine plan that merely ratifies the prophet's own preferred policies, expecting to "win the war by means more certain than an army" (QH I: 451). When Isaiah is originally called to prophecy, the narrative immediately passes to a vision of Israel's desolation (6: 1-8, 11-12); and the prophet does not cease to warn that the people will be given "the bread of adversity and the water of affliction" (30: 19). The recurrence of such symbols as the "remnant" and the "stump" (e.g. 11: 16; 6: 13) show that Isaiah is far from specific about "the survival of Judah as an organized people in pragmatic history" (*Ibid*: 451): "he who believes will not be in haste" (28: 16).

Certainly, there is a sense in which the prophet claims to know the "plan" of God. But there is no "aura of magic" about this "knowledge". It is, firstly, as we shall shortly see that Voegelin is himself aware, knowledge in the mode of faith: the fundamental Israelite faith that God, the faithful one, will not abandon his people. Secondly, Isaiah's knowledge is that which is inherent to the prophetic vocation, without which, it seems, one cannot be called a "prophet" at all. The prophets have "stood in the council of the Lord" as the false prophets have not (*Jeremiah* 23: 18-22; cf. also the

reference to Moses in *Numbers* 12: 6-8, and *Amos* 3: 7). Such knowledge by no means purports to penetrate the divine mystery. Isaiah never loses an awed sense of the holiness of God, of the discrepancy between imagination and expression (as Heschel puts it), and he knows his articulations to fall far short of the divine reality (Heschel, 1971: 50, 137). If the Egyptians, are "men and not God" (*Isaiah* 31: 3), so is the prophet himself.

The final aspect of what Voegelin holds to be Isaiah's metastatic faith is the depiction of the transfigured universe in 2: 2-4, which Voegelin calls "a vision of metastatic world peace" (OH I: 480). The scope and the proper limits of the human hope for historical transformation will be considered in Chapter Eight of this thesis. But two remarks may now be made about the case of Isaiah.

Voegelin's sarcasm, "governmental institutions and their human incumbents are no longer required", is unwarranted. The vision represents the peoples (their rulers not excluded!) streaming to Zion to be taught by God. It is implied not that governments are superfluous but that they will learn to act so as to promote peace. It is interesting that Voegelin chooses to delimit the passage as 2: 2-4, rather than as 2: 2-5, since verse 5 ("O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord"), makes clear that the substance of the vision is an *ethical* appeal to the people as presently constituted, with its political leadership still in place.

The vision, secondly, is an explicitly hyperbolic attempt to symbolize what it might mean for the whole earth to manifest God's glory in such a way that even the spiritually dull might sense it (6: 3). If it reflected the pragmatic expectation of a society in which governments and armies were redundant, the prophet would surely show more literary tact than to employ images of a transfigured natural world so bathed in fantasy as to

erode their plausibility (11: 6-9). But, of course, he glories in them. We are to understand, it seems, that human yearnings are to be fulfilled: and that one's imagining of the possibilities of transformation is not to be restricted to what "common sense" suggests to be realistic, because that restriction would itself dissolve the mystery of God's providence. The vision is eschatological, in that it will "come to pass in the latter days" (2: 2). In other words, the consummation of history is not co-terminous with the ending of history.

The vision is eschatological in the broad sense described by Jenni (1962: 126): "a future in which the circumstances of history are changed to such an extent that one can speak of a new, entirely different, state of things without, in so doing, leaving the framework of history" (see also, Barton, 1986: 214-19). For Voegelin, though, history is eschatological only in the restricted sense that it moves towards an end. His guiding image of the metaxy, derived from Plato, implies that the consummation and the ending of history coincide, and, therefore, that the Judaic eschatological expectation of a historical "Messianic Age" involves a contradiction in terms. If Voegelin does misread the Isaian prophecy, it is probably because he approaches the Hebrew prophets from the perspective (in this sense, alien) of Plato.

This surmise seems to be confirmed by a reading of some of Voegelin's most brilliant but also most puzzling pages (OH I: 460-65). They are puzzling because Voegelin shows, in a series of subtle formulations, that he is fully aware of the true nature of the prophetic message (and, indeed, the prophets' "knowledge" of God), while never retracting his charge of metastasis.

The contractual symbolism of the Covenant might suggest that Israel's defections released God from the Covenant promise. But "the abyss of revelation and faith

proved incommensurable with the logic of contract". For the substance of the Covenant is not an agreement between equal partners, but the revelation of God as the source of all order:

the prophets penetrated what in modern terminology may be called the dialectics of divine foreknowledge and human decision. . . . since God did not use the method of trial and error, the revealed order had to be realized; whatever Israel did, it had to remain the Chosen People. On the side of human decision they knew: the empirical Israel did not realize the revealed order; and a terrible disaster, amounting to extinction, was impending in pragmatic politics (*Ibid*: 461-62).

Thus there arises the structure of the double prophecies of punishment and salvation. Here we arrive at the core of Voegelin's argument:

The prophecies will become senseless if they are understood as flat predictions of future events, without any bearing on the attunement of human to divine order through the change of heart. This proposition . . . . is valid, however, only on the level of prophetic existence. The literal, or fundamentalist, understanding of prophecy as flat information about the future acquires a sinister and even deadly sense if it is the deliberate misunderstanding by the people of whom the change of heart is demanded. . . . The stubborn of heart are clever dialecticians themselves; they know quite as well as the prophets that the will of God, expressed in his choice, cannot be stultified by the people (*Ibid*).

Now this argument shows that the metastatic faith lies with Isaiah's hearers, not with Isaiah. The prophets are obliged to speak from their own insight, even if they will "inevitably" be misheard. Their knowledge, too, is authentic, and any "aura of magic" is supplied by those who interpret the sayings as "flat information about the future".

What is surprising, in the light of this insight, is that Voegelin treats Isaiah's demand that Ahaz cease to put his security in alliances not as a call for "attunement to divine order", properly made by the prophet though susceptible to misunderstanding, but as a

pragmatic directive. In so doing, he himself makes it metastatic, by (as it were) himself taking the "fundamentalist" perspective of Ahaz. Isaiah's apparent lack of military realism appears to fuse in Voegelin's mind with the visionary imagery of 2: 2-4 and 11:6-9, so constituting a compensatory dream born of the prophet's despair over Israel; a dream "in which the tension of historical order was abolished by a divine act of grace" (*Ibid*: 465).

#### *The Authoritative Consciousness of Jeremiah*

Voegelin's criticism of Isaiah may usefully be compared with his eulogy of Jeremiah. After Isaiah, he argues, prophecy had reached an impasse: one could only "sit down and wait for the miracle to happen". Generations would pass before "the validity of what had become an article of faith" could be re-examined (*Ibid*: 481).<sup>28</sup>

According to Voegelin (*OH I*: 481-84), Jeremiah succeeded in this re-examination. He "advances beyond the metastatic visions of Isaiah" because he abstains from "gazing into a future which never became present" and returns to "the experience of the untransfigured present". This constitutes an advance because "the fundamental concern of man is with the attunement of his existence, in the present tense, to the order of being". Isaiah had rightly seen that the true order of society was present in those "who challenge the disorder of the surrounding society with the order they experience as living in themselves". But he had demanded as a sign of conversion a metastatic sign of trust from Ahaz, and when the king had had the "good sense" to refuse, Isaiah saw no recourse other than to posit the future appearance of a messianic ruler who would transcend such faithlessness. Jeremiah reverses this "futuristic projection" by "transferring the royal symbolism to himself".<sup>29</sup>

As Jeremiah meets crisis, rejection and vindication, therefore, he embodies the fate of the entire people: "the holy omphalos of history had contracted from the Chosen People into his personal existence":

He was the sole representative of divine order; and whatever the inscrutable will of God might hold for the future, the meaning of the present was determined by the Word that was spoken from the divine-human omphalos in Jeremiah. The Chosen People had been replaced by the chosen man (*Ibid*: 466-67).

As evidence for this claim Voegelin cites the narrative of Jeremiah's call. The language of his consecration in 1: 5 is "borrowed from the royal symbolism of the cosmological empires"; the oracle of vv. 7-8, in which the prophet's hesitation is overridden by Yahweh's promise to be with him has the same structure as the commissioning of Moses from the thornbush; and in v. 10 the prophet is given authority over the nations and the kingdoms, "to root up and to pull down, to destroy and to plant" (*Ibid*: 469). Symbolically, therefore, Jeremiah is invested with the authority at once of the king, of Moses, and even of God. It is true that Jeremiah still addresses an appeal to the people but when this is decisively rejected (18: 12) he becomes "the sole vicar of God" (*Ibid*: 470).

The pressure imposed on the prophet by this role, notes Voegelin, "must have been enormous". Jeremiah retained the compact, "essentially metastatic" form of prophetic experience, by which the tension of order "had dissolved into the successive periods of disaster and salvation" (*Ibid*: 484). But the "lamentations" dramatize his renewed awareness both of the tension of order itself and of its primary location in his own consciousness. His own personality is at once "the battlefield of order and disorder in history" and "the authoritative source of order in society" (*Ibid*: 485).

Now, the juxtaposition of these last two phrases suggests a possible incoherence in Voegelin's argument.

To the extent that disorder is present in the psyche of Jeremiah he fails, by definition, to be an authoritative source of order in society. If, as is claimed, he were the single authoritative source of order in society his own consciousness would have to transcend the condition of all consciousness in the metaxy, that it embodies a tension between perfection and imperfection. Voegelin seems to be smuggling *into Jeremiah's own psyche* the eschatological idyll that he has repudiated in Isaiah's vision of the future.

I shall argue that Voegelin makes an ingenious but unsuccessful attempt to resolve this problem. He cites the lurid curses levelled by Jeremiah at his enemies (18: 21-23; 11: 20; 22: 19). But this vengefulness

must not be covered with charitable silence, as if it were a weakness unbecoming a distinguished public figure. For it is precious evidence of the spiritual fire that burned in him. . . . [He] was not the man to make exceptions for personal enemies. On the contrary, since he was the representative of divine order, forgiveness for an attack on his life would have been a presumptuous attribution of importance to his private sentiments and a betrayal of his status. The prophet of Israel could not condone an attack on the life that served Yahweh (*Ibid*: 486).

This argument invites criticism in two ways.

Firstly, this passage virtually dismisses the moral relevance of Jeremiah's vengefulness. In fact, Voegelin argues that Jeremiah ceases to be a moral agent precisely in so far as he is the oracle of God. When Voegelin speaks of Jeremiah's personality as the "battleground of order and disorder", he seems to be referring not to a moral tension within himself, but to his struggle against *others'* disbelief and hostility. But a prophet, even more than others, has the duty of attuning himself to divine order: and as that order is ultimately one of mercy and loving-kindness, it is strange for Voegelin to claim that forgiveness by the prophet would be a mere personal indulgence. His attempt to reconcile Jeremiah's

authority with his vulnerability, in order to acknowledge a metaxic tension within what I have termed the "eschatological idyll" of Jeremiah's consciousness, only succeeds in confirming that he posits in Jeremiah a kind of "metastasis" of moral life.<sup>30</sup>

Secondly, it is true that the narrative of Jeremiah focuses on the prophet's own psyche more than does that of First Isaiah. But the difference is one of emphasis only. To complement the "internal conversion" promised in 31: 31-34, for example, Jeremiah prophesies a transfigured future for the people (24: 4-7, and particularly 31: 1-20). Are we to regard these prophecies as metastatic? If so, the authority of Jeremiah's consciousness is immediately discredited.

### Christian Prophetic Radicalism

#### *The Sermon on the Mount*

To complete this chapter we shall consider how Voegelin's analysis of prophetic consciousness, and especially of its alleged tendency to metastasis, applies to Christian articulations of prophetic radicalism, in particular to the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>31</sup>

Voegelin once suggested that the relationship between the *Republic* and the *Laws* parallels that between the Sermon on the Mount and the discourse of the early Church (OH III: 226-28). The *Republic* is a "prophetic" call for *periagoge*, "a call which presupposes that man is capable of following it", whereas in the *Laws* Plato "has arrived at the Pauline, ecclesiastic compromise with the frailty of man". In the *Laws*, therefore, Plato proposes "theocratic institutions that will be bearable to men as they are", though they will necessarily fall short of the spirit of the *Republic*. Similarly,



The counsels of the Sermon originate in a spirit of eschatological heroism. If they were followed by the Christian layman to the letter among men as they are, they would be suicidal. . . . While the counsels of the Sermon cannot become rules of social conduct in the world as it is, they are nevertheless the substance of Christian doctrine. If they and their guidance were removed from Christianity, the power centre that makes it an effective historical reality would be destroyed. Since the Sermon is unbearable in its purity, the Church infuses as much of its substance as men are capable of absorbing while living in the world (OH III: 226).

Therefore, "the mediation of the stark reality of Jesus to the level of human expediency, with a minimum loss of substance, is one of the functions of the Church".

Voegelin wishes to establish two points. Firstly, the authoritative prophetic source of order is not powerless to effect social transformation, as long as it is tempered by a mediating institution (Church, or Law) to accommodate human frailty. (Unless so mediated, the counsels would be metastatic, and inapplicable to actual historical circumstances.) Therefore the *Laws* does not *betray* the *Republic*, nor the Church the spirit of the Beatitudes. Secondly, and uncontentiously, the counsels are distorted if regarded as rigid rules. They are a horizon which always recedes as it is approached.

But this position has serious difficulties. There is, firstly, some obscurity in the notion of "counsels" which are taken to be authoritative. Are they commands, or recommendations? As far as Voegelin is concerned, it seems, they are intrinsically impracticable, and their *effective* authority is to be determined by some agency extrinsic to the source itself. It is presumed by Voegelin's formulation that this agency possesses the substance of the counsels, yet also possesses the practical wisdom to discern the extent to which they can be filtered through to the world. But such an exemplary

and improbable hybrid would rightly *supplant* the prophetic discourse as the final authority.<sup>32</sup>

Secondly, as it turns out, Voegelin also wishes to delimit the manner in which the Sermon offers "guidance" at all. He admits its validity only on the "spiritual" level, not as it might refer to social and economic life.

In the "History of Political Ideas" he explains that according to the Beatitudes the poor are blessed because riches entangle their possessors in the "manifold interests of the world" and so impede them from directing their lives towards the impending Kingdom Of God. It follows logically from this insight of the Beatitudes, Voegelin writes, that the rich should be the object of compassion and special missionary endeavour. On the contrary, even in Jesus himself "a hostile attitude against members of the upper class can be felt. . . . Love is the law of the new community, but not much love is lost with the hardened who will not turn" (Hooy, quoting *Luke* 12: 49-53). In Voegelin's view this "eschatological hardness" of Jesus tends to be misunderstood by his followers, and the evangelist Luke has perhaps contributed to this misunderstanding, even if he does not share it. "The Sermon in the Plain shows a strong tendency to see the blessings of the heavenly Kingdom as rewards and consolations for those who have suffered more than their due share in this world": quite apart, that is, from their own *metanoia*.<sup>33</sup>

If one compares Matthew's and Luke's versions of the Sermon, Matthew's

shows the characteristics which are usually called "spiritualization". A careful analysis . . . would show that the "spiritualization" does not import a new meaning to the Sayings, but that Matthew tries elaborately to find formulae which, by their wording, prevent misunderstandings to which the text of Luke might be exposed if it falls into the hands of simple souls (Hooy).

Correctly understood, firstly, "the question of property and wealth is not considered a social problem at all, but a personal": and secondly, "the eschatological character of the Gospel is incompatible with any idea of social or economic reorganization of society".

There follows the passage which has been quoted above in the slightly modified form it takes in OH III: "It is not a doctrine which can be followed by men who live in a less intense environment, who expect to live out their lives and who wish to make the world livable for their families", nor can it be a "system of social ethics". There is an inherent tension between the inspiration, the "permanent regulative force", of the Sermon and "accepted standards" of civilization: therefore, there will be waves of reformation and reorientation towards the radical demands and, conversely, "when the swing towards the eschatological demands goes too far, the civilizational structure, which is based on a compromise with the natural gifts of man, is imperilled":

Parallel with the waves of reformations, we witness, therefore, the series of struggles between the conservative civilizational and the radical anti-civilizational forces. The eschatological character of the Sermon is not only a source of spiritual and ethical reformation, but also of civilizational destruction (*Ibid*).

Voegelin therefore confines the "spiritual" to the realm of the "personal", and opposes it to the "social" and "economic". The Beatitudes, he contends, offer an authentic spirituality, and can transform the soul: but any attempt to make them socially effective is not only doomed to fail in part (which one might accept), it is an aberration, a kind of category mistake, by which civilization is "imperilled", and against which civilizational forces are presumably justified in protecting themselves.

Of course, Voegelin might agree that the "personal" appeal of Jesus is not addressed to individuals only. He calls whole communities to repentance (cf. *Matthew* 11:21, *Luke* 10: 13). But Voegelin's argument depends on the view that "spiritualization" embodies the "substance" of the Gospel, so that an unqualified primacy may be given to the "spiritualized" version of the Beatitudes: hence his suggestion that Matthew's Beatitudes rectify the dangerously concrete formulations of Luke, which themselves invite misunderstanding. But this is a disconcerting simplification, possible only to someone who has the prior notion that the spiritual and the socio-economic are discrete realms. If the Matthaean Beatitudes remind us that no societal circumstances are canonized by the Gospel, the Lukan Beatitudes make it clear, by associating the poor with other groups who suffer concretely, that God's "preference" for the poor is because they are poor, not because they are virtuous or intrinsically open to conversion. As J. de Santa Ana expresses it (1977: 17), "the happiness of the poor has its theological basis in God himself". All people, to be sure, are called to *metanoia*, are invited to recognize their essential "poverty" and need of God; but God's promise of the Kingdom will not bypass those whose poverty needs no special sensitivity to discern, and God will not be found wanting by those who have no hope *except* in him (cf. also, Pannenberg, 1968: 273).

Conversely, to regard the "Woes" which complement the Lukan Beatitudes as an expression of resentment and hostility, as does Voegelin, resolves the existential issue only by declining to engage with it. The Woes express a theme which lies at the heart of *Luke*, that the Kingdom of God which is at hand is to reverse worldly states (cf. the "Magnificat" of 1: 46-55, and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, 16: 19-31). The truth of the "Woes" is that those who "are rich now", who "are full now", who "laugh now", stand under judgment. No

explanation of these texts can be adequate which presumes that only "simple souls" will take them seriously.<sup>34</sup> Voegelin has succeeded only in explaining away the Lukan Beatitudes, not explaining them.

What Voegelin implicitly repudiates, in his treatment of the Beatitudes as in that of Isaiah, is the truth that the Kingdom of God (the eschatological realm of the Beatitudes) is related to civilizational order not only as a counter-principle, but also as a fulfilment; and as a fulfilment which is not to be denied a foothold in the present. The Gospel would be "anti-civilizational" only if "civilization" were itself *defined* by its impermeability to the Kingdom: in that case, indeed, movements based on the Gospel could at best succeed in reaching an accommodation with civilization.<sup>35</sup>

#### *Gospel-Influenced Radicalism*

Voegelin's other appeal to the "Sermon on the Mount" occurs in the context of a discussion of the anarchism of Tolstoy (ER: 219-21). Tolstoy believed he was returning to the purity of a "Christian ethics based directly on the Gospel", but, in Voegelin's view, he was anti-Christian in that he accepted Christian ethics while rejecting the "spiritual substance", and thus ended in a self-righteous purism. Against Tolstoy Voegelin asserts once again that the Sermon is "not a code for the life in the 'world'; it is addressed to men who live between the worlds in eschatological expectation". But he then goes further:

In historical existence, entangled in the network of social obligations, man has to pay his debt to nature and is obliged to commit acts in violation of the *Sermon*. If struck on the right cheek, he will not turn his left, but hit back in defence of his life, his family and his community. But in hitting back, he will do good, as a Christian, to remember the *Sermon*, and to be aware that in defence he is involved in guilt and that the man who struck him may have quite as excellent "worldly" reasons for

the attack as he has for the defence. Both are involved in a common guilt, both are engulfed in the inscrutable mystery of evil in the world, and in their enmity both have to respect in each other the secret of the heart known only to God (*Ibid*; 220).

This formulation implies that the spiritual substance of the Sermon on the Mount is not only irreducible to ethics, but is so radically anti-ethical as to offer no basis for ethical discrimination either in personal or collective life. The Sermon on the Mount, ironically, takes for Voegelin the role which classical Lutheranism has attributed to the Mosaic Law - to convict humankind of sin. To live in the world, one must act pragmatically and acknowledge one's failure; one can scarcely even "repent", since Voegelin offers no basis for any effective intention to act otherwise in future.

Let us consider one further case. An intriguing section of the "History of Political Ideas" (Hooy) represents St. Francis of Assisi as a saintly radical of "unworldly naiveté" - whose witness is unwittingly at odds with the Gospel. According to Voegelin's interpretation of Francis, "Man is not called to repent because the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand (*Matthew 3: 2*), but the life in poverty and obedience is counselled rather as the permanent constitution of the world in conformance with the life of the Saviour". Francis is "superbly sensitive to God's creation where it is most creaturely and least self-assertive", and this is his greatness. But his "joyful preoccupation with the new discovery resulted in a distinct limitation of Christian experience", in that "he conformed his life to the suffering of Christ, not to Christ the king in his glory". The Christ of Francis is "an inner-worldly Christ of the poor", and not either the "priestly-royal hierarch" or "the head of the whole *corpus mysticum* of mankind". But by neglecting the "Christ of the hierarchy", Francis jeopardized the civilizational work of

the Church. His saintliness was crucial, because it allowed his revolutionary consciousness to be integrated into the Church, so that the great schism was delayed and the Church was enriched (Voegelin is far from thinking saintliness of no social consequence); but the political wisdom of Cardinal Ugolino (later Pope Gregory IX) was no less heroic and momentous, since it led him to protect rather than repulse the Franciscan movement.

Voegelin's position with regard to St. Francis is consistent with his view of the Sermon on the Mount, and is open to similar objections. Francis's way of life would represent a *rejection* of the hierarchic principle of the Church only if his own life purported to express the entirety of the Gospel. As Voegelin says, "no human being can conform his life [entirely] to the Messiah"; but we may presume Francis to have known this. His life calls rulers to conversion. If Cardinal Ugolino's patronage was aimed only at retaining ecclesiastical control over the Franciscan movement, it manifests no more than diplomatic shrewdness. His receptiveness was "heroic" only if he recognized that the movement was an authentic evangelical call for repentance addressed, not least, to the hierarchical Church: if he recognized, in other words that the "civilizational work" of the Church fell under the concrete challenge of the Gospel.

Voegelin's own view of the relationship between spiritual truth and ethical responsibility may be taken to contrast with the triple fallacy he attributes to Tolstoy. Tolstoy does not accept that evil emanates from human nature and is therefore "to be remedied as far as possible in concrete instances but not to be abolished on principle". Secondly, from the experience of concrete evil he posits a generalized, abstract evil that attaches to institutions. Thirdly, personal guilt is attached to those who "happen to be the bearers of the institutions" (ER: 221).<sup>36</sup>

We may sum up. Voegelin does not deny that the "spiritual substance" of prophetic consciousness will affect society indirectly, through the personal influence of the converted. In his view, however, any attempt to modify the structures of "civilization" so that they reflect such a spiritual consciousness is metastatic and self-defeating. Whether it challenges the civilizational obligations of rulers (as did Isaiah), or the accommodations practised by ecclesiastical statesmen (like St. Francis), its purism and intolerance renders it marginal, sectarian and divisive. As in the case of Jeremiah, therefore, spiritual substance always stands over against society.

The unsought consequence of Voegelin's position, is that civilizational structures (whether of state or church) must, in their turn, be inherently closed to spirit.<sup>37</sup> The "regulative function" and the "guidance" of spiritual insight is, in fact, repudiated, except nominally: for the infusion of spiritual considerations into political or economic life is deemed potentially effective only in proportion as any confrontation with civilizational order is minimized, trimmed to fit some mediating body's idea of what is tolerable. Voegelin's care that metaxic structure remain inviolate (expressed in his insistence that metastasis is a fall from truth) paradoxically leads him to a practical repudiation of the truth of metaxy. For if there is only "tension" between the prophetic and the civilizational orders, one must infer that harmony as well as conflict can, to an indefinite extent, obtain between them. His polarization, further, means that it is idle to hope for pragmatic action that is consistently principled, and, therefore, that Voegelin is no better able than is (on his account) Isaiah himself to explore how one might *negotiate* the tension between the demands of pragmatic existence and attunement to Being.



**PART TWO**

CHAPTER SEVEN  
INDIVIDUAL ENLIGHTENMENT AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

The problems of human order in society and history originate in the order of consciousness. Hence the philosophy of consciousness is the centrepiece of a philosophy of politics. . . . As the consciousness is the centre that radiates the concrete order of human existence into society and history, so the empiricism of social and historical phenomena of order reaches into the empiricism of consciousness and its experiences of participation (Voegelin, in Lawrence, 1984: 35, 36)<sup>1</sup>

At the heart of Voegelin's political philosophy is the belief that politics is a mode of discourse which structures the world in a certain way, and therefore is rooted in consciousness.

For Plato, it is true both that society is an "order of the soul" and that the soul is "a social order of forces" (OH III: 11). Spirit and social structures therefore reciprocally affect each other. Social structures can, indeed, "destroy a man's soul" (OH III: 69). But Voegelin has no doubt that there is a hierarchy among the levels of reality which must not be subverted, according to which consciousness must always be given the primacy over social structures.<sup>2</sup>

To be consistent, therefore, Voegelin must envisage a society's transformation as the reflection of a logically prior change in the consciousness of its members. Writing of Hellas, which he takes to be paradigmatic, he says that there was necessarily a tension between the polis and "the spiritual adventure of the poets and philosophers". But unless these enlightened individuals were to be mere irritants to the polis,

something like a Great Awakening was required to create a society in wakeful response to the depth of the soul, to the new humanity in love of the *sophon*, discovered by the philosophers.

The Great Awakening was the feat of the Athenian people in the fifth century B.C. - with consequences for the history of mankind which have not been exhausted to this day (OH II: 241).

The "Great Awakening" was manifest in the capacity of the Athenian audience to share in the tragic action of Aeschylus's *Suppliants*. That play enacts the search on the part of King and Chorus alike for a true justice (*dike*) which far transcends both utilitarian calculation and the observance of positive law (*Ibid*: 247-53; see also NSP: 70-73). Voegelin thinks that this illustration can bear the weight he puts on it because the Athenian audience does not merely watch the play as an entertainment, but unites itself with the characters' descent into the depths of their soul. In this way, therefore, the people of Athens are more mature than the people who reduced the Judaic Torah to a code of norms.<sup>3</sup>

In Voegelin's view, therefore, it is its "awakening", its spiritual stature, which marks the just society. The specific institutional order of fifth century Athens is almost immaterial: in any case, it is short-lived, soon to decay.<sup>4</sup> In keeping with this view, the instrument of true social change is also noetic, namely *peitho* (persuasion): just as in the *Suppliants*, the Chorus effectively "persuades" the King to act in accordance with *dike* on their behalf. Once *peitho* ceases to determine policy, the Athenian order "will disintegrate and give way to the nightmarish disorder that we find described by Thucydides" (*Ibid*: 252): the attempt to restore it then has to be one of the major themes of Plato's work.

This instance of personal and of social transformation embodies a stark asymmetry, which furnishes the theme for this chapter. Personal consciousness can be said to advance in truth as "compactness" gives way to "differentiation". Such an advance might constitute a "leap in being" and so be irreversible, in the sense that one is not permitted to forego it. But within the metaxy no achievement can be decisive. As Voegelin writes, "The discovery of truth by the mystic-philosophers, and still more the Christian revelation, can become a source of serious disorder if it is misunderstood as an ordering force that effectively governs society and history". He goes on to identify the "speculative fallacy that the transcendental order, which is sensed in the orienting movements of the soul, is a world-immanent order, realizing itself in society independent of the life of the soul". Such a fallacy "lets man forget that the world is what it is" (OH II: 255). This is why, in Voegelin's opinion, Isaiah's faith in God's care for Israel becomes "metastatic" (and why Isaiah himself *rightly* becomes socially ineffectual) precisely at the point where he appeals to King Ahaz to allow transcendent faith to determine military policy.

Now Voegelin's argument may be stated in two forms, of which the weaker is admissible. One can, indeed, envisage no social transformation "independent of the life of the soul": nor does the transcendent "effectively govern" society and history in any straightforward way, because it is necessarily always present in tension with other causative factors. In this weaker form of the argument, one may add without inconsistency that the psyche itself is always subject to causes other than divine revelation, and cannot be transformed independent of society. But Voegelin seems to adopt the stronger position, that there is *no transformation at all* except that of the soul: that as soon as a single or a collective consciousness seeks to be embodied in determinate

policies or institutions, it defeats itself, because "the world is what it is" - the world being defined by its resistance to transcendence.

It might immediately be objected against this stronger interpretation that Voegelin presents the *Suppliants* precisely as the paradigm case where an enlightened consciousness successfully expresses itself in action. But such an objection appears to fail, because the situation of the drama is posited in such an extreme manner as to defeat its paradigmatic function.

Firstly, the Argives' search for justice leads to a *decision*, but scarcely to a policy. A policy commits its adopters to a certain consistency of conduct, whereas the decision over the Danaïdes clearly implies no general undertaking to offer hospitality to refugees in future. In order to partake of transcendent *dike*, every significant political decision must (unimaginably) be enacted with an equivalent rigour, in a process by which ruler and people share a profound moral cleansing, in which a "leap of being" occurs. As Voegelin explains,

Not every type of conduct, therefore, is action. We can speak of action only when the decision was reached through the Dionysiac descent into the divine depth. . . . A negative decision, an evasion through utilitarian calculus, or a mere insensitiveness towards the issue would not be considered action (*Ibid*: 251).

Secondly, resolution of the dilemma of the *Suppliants* requires "a citizenry that willingly opens its soul to the tragic conflict" (*Ibid*). In the event, since the Argives' adversaries are open to no such "persuasion" the Hellenic polis must, after all, go to war, and appears "through its combination of *Dike* and Valour in the body of the military citizenry, as a shining bulwark of order in a very disorderly world" (*Ibid*: 253). In the tragedy, then, the moral discernment of political action supposes

a community of saints, and is impracticable beyond the bounds of such a community. Again, this is unimaginable.

It seems, therefore, that enlightened consciousness can prevail only under conditions that can never in fact be operative. When the unconverted exert any influence on political decisions (as they always and inevitably do, since "the world is what it is") the enlightened discover that "persuasion" is ineffectual. But coercion would taint their moral authority at its source and any institutionalizing of the decision-making process would abandon the spirit.

With the threat of such an impasse in view, this chapter will consider two distinct but related issues. The first is how *consciousness as such* (both individual and corporate) is related to "social structures". The second is how the formation and transformation of the individual self is related to "society", where "society" is experienced by individuals as a milieu of shared consciousness.

### Social Structures and Consciousness

By "social structures" we mean those features of social reality which operate relatively independently of human volition, whether individual or collective. It is useful to distinguish two levels of such structures.

The influential historian of the *Annales* school, Fernand Braudel, applies the term "structures" specifically to phenomena of the *longue durée*, to impersonal and intractable forces which far exceed the span of a single human life but provide the framework for all lives. Biographical narratives and particular historical events are superficial and evanescent, mere waves borne on the tides of the *longue durée*: to take the perspective of the individual life (what Jacques Le Goff calls the

*temps vécu*) is to condemn oneself to illusion, because one has no way of discriminating between the trivial and the important, so that "real history" escapes one's view (Skinner, 1985: 179-98: cf. Le Goff, 1989).

Such structures may be geo-physical (for instance, those of climate and vegetation), or cultural (those of economic or class relationships, agricultural practices, etc.). One will assign to the realm of the *longue durée* such cultural shifts as those which are described by the sociologist Robert Nisbet as "irreversible":

We are urban, democratic, industrial, bureaucratic, rationalized, large scale, formal, secular and technological. The fact that many of us are uncomfortable . . . . does not affect the matter. (1966: 317).

The word "irreversible", however, is here ambiguous. It is obvious by definition that we cannot simply undo history: and the changes Nisbet refers to are of such range and cumulative force that no single group of people, and perhaps no single generation, could voluntarily affect their course. So much is implied by the category of the *longue durée*. But it does not follow that we are simply condemned to be governed by an ever-more powerful technology or bureaucracy. Trends are reversible, though events are not.

Politics and political theology tend to conceive of "structures" differently. A structure here is any institution, any procedure, any convention or assumption, which patterns human behaviour (Blondel, 1976: 20-25). It might be enduring (like a class structure), or potentially ephemeral (like an Act of Parliament). Like the forces of the *longue durée* such a structure reaches into human consciousness. Unlike them, it might reflect identifiable human choices.

To appreciate the importance of distinguishing between the two levels of structure, let us consider an argument given by Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*:

When inequality of conditions is the common law of society, the most marked inequalities do not strike the eye; when everything is nearly on the same level, the slightest are marked enough to hurt it. Hence the desire for equality always becomes more insatiable in proportion as equality is more complete (quoted Nisbet, 1966: 188).

De Tocqueville here identifies, rightly or not, a "structure" of social psychology: that the tolerance of social inequalities varies in direct proportion to the persistence of those very inequalities. It follows that any egalitarian movement which overlooks such a "law" will doom itself to frustration. But it does not follow that the search for economic equality is futile: only that the approach to it might exacerbate social conflict. And conflict may be a lesser evil than rampant inequality, just as one ought to feed the hungry even if one thereby lends them strength to oppose one's wishes. In other words, the "objective" structural facts about, say, the societal disposition of wealth cannot determine the proper human response to them.<sup>5</sup>

By definition, phenomena of the *longue duree* will tend to be experienced as givens, as "dispensation" (Habermas, 1987: 318). But to invest "institutions" with a similar absoluteness (and therefore with immunity from challenge) might well be a renunciation of human responsibility.

Now for Voegelin the primary "structure" is that of the metaxy itself, the fact that the world exists in a tension between perfection and imperfection. In his view, then, there is a range of phenomena that underlies even those of the *longue duree*, phenomena that apply universally, though always in a contingent way. One of these phenomena is what one might term the necessary ubiquity of discontent:



At the basis of the experienced dissatisfaction lie the general miseries that afflict human existence, enumerated by Hesiod as hunger, hard work, disease, early death, and the injuries the weaker must suffer at the hands of the stronger (OH V: 35-36).

One must recognize the inescapability of these afflictions, without, of course, resigning oneself to their specific manifestations. Voegelin continues:

This general potential of dissatisfaction can then be exponentially aggravated by the disturbances of personal and social existence through events with historical mass effect (*Ibid*; 36).

He lists such factors as the disruption worked by violent or peaceful population movements through migration or conquest, sudden changes in population size brought about by disease and famine or by technological progress, "the vast destruction of ethnic cultures by the imperial entrepreneurs of the Ecumenic Age", and the "creation of the power differential between the Western and all other civilizations through the intellectual, scientific, commercial, and industrial revolutions in the West, as well as the exploitation of the differential to its global limits" (*Ibid*).

But central to Voegelin's entire life's work is the belief that noesis (or its absence) itself affects the course of structural change. This belief separates him from the *Annales* school. It also entails the rejection of any straightforward opposition between "dispensation" and "institution".<sup>6</sup> For one who affirms the metaxy, neither fatalism nor the sense of omnicompetence is ever permissible.

This position is clarified in Voegelin's essay of 1968, "Configurations of History":

"Configuration refers to more than the patterns that are observable in history, such as sequences of institutions. . . . conceptions of order in a civilization are always accompanied by the self-interpretation of that order as meaningful, that is, the persons living in an order have particular

opinions about the particular meaning that order has. In this sense, self-interpretation is always part of the reality in which we live (Voegelin, 1968b: 25).

In other words, even structures of the *longue durée* are not merely givens. For example, the effect of climate on human life is by no means determined in advance of human freedom: climate, though in a sense "beyond human control", can also be modified by human activities such as afforestation and deforestation.

Nevertheless, as we began this chapter by saying, structures profoundly affect human experience. In fact, as Voegelin recognizes, we need to be aware of the structural factors which characterize any historical epoch even to understand its philosophy.<sup>7</sup> So Voegelin, the philosopher of consciousness, also strives to understand how specific historical structures reach into the psyche. His unpublished paper of 1939, "Democracy and the Individual" (Hooqy), for example, describes the vast social changes that have occurred since the idea of democracy was formulated in the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> He points to the immense class of industrial workers whose lot depends neither on their own competence nor on circumstances apparently beyond human control (i.e. on "dispensation"), but on human decisions taken by a small group of people over whom the workers have almost no influence. This "specifically totalitarian" structure affects not only individuals' jobs, but most details of their material lives - the supply of fuel, water, and so on: "The great modern organizations require less of personal responsibility and initiative, and more of discipline and exactness in obeying orders".<sup>9</sup>

At the hub of his argument is the claim that the conditions which make for collective and submissive discipline undermine that responsible participation on which democracy relies. The era of "the Russian 5-year

plan, the German 4-year plan, the French 3-year plan", he remarks, may be styled "a period of plan-mysticism":

The "plan" has become in the minds of millions of people the solution of their existential problems. Not a plan made by themselves, but a plan made by somebody else (Hooq).

The purpose of Voegelin's paper is to identify the European social groups which, at the time of writing, are respectively the most and the least likely to succumb to a totalitarian politics. The most vulnerable groups, he suggests, are the lower-ranking officials of large organizations; those applied scientists who are trained in technique but not in critical thought and believe that any messy situation can be solved by "doing something about it"; those, such as army officers, who "are democratically indifferent because they lead a life of discipline"; and victims of economic crisis, whether the unemployed or the otherwise disaffected (especially middle-class victims of the steep inflation). The centres of resistance will be found especially in the peasant population "insofar as they can still make a comparatively independent living and don't like too much regimentation"; in many church groups (he finds countries of strong religious culture, such as Holland and Switzerland, to be less amenable to anti-democratic movements); and among industrial workers (who, he reckons, believe in a different brand of collectivism).

The remedies Voegelin proposes demonstrate that, in order to restore the scope of what he awkwardly terms "personality power", he by no means disdains action at the level of institutional reorganization:

the social institutions have to be changed in such a way that a modicum of security is restored to the individual. The details need not concern us here, the general type of measures are well known: insurance against disease, temporary unemployment, old age, infirmity, etc; relative job security; safeguards against abuse of job-security; governmental interference in the economic system (*Ibid*).

Because he thinks security of status is a greater priority for most people than their "standard of living" he is willing to entrust technical economic decisions (which most people "could not understand anyway") to experts.

I do not think that the experts will do a perfect job. They will make mistakes which will cost the nation billions. But private enterprise is not wholly constructive either but wastes billions of social wealth by bad or speculative investment, bad financing techniques, bad management. And I do not see why the destruction of social wealth should be the privilege of private individuals; let government experts have a hand in it too (*Ibid*).

This analysis is striking for its cheerfully flippant disrespect for "private enterprise", which, as we shall see in Chapter Nine, would disconcert some of those who appeal to Voegelin's work for support. It also helps to clarify the implications of what we have identified as the stronger interpretation of his position.

Certain social arrangements affect the quality of human experience and significantly influence the communal capacity to construct a tolerable political order. The institutions which mediate this influence may well need to be remodelled and rationalized: further, this remodeling is possible. The institutions, however, do not themselves constitute the political order, which can only be discerned at the level of spirit. To change the institutions, though necessary, is not to "transform" the social order itself. Secondly, even within the realm of what can be changed, some social decisions and procedures are of central political concern, others (including the management of the economy) have such a subordinate status that they can legitimately be delegated to technical experts. These latter affairs are not negligible: but if they become the focus of a society's political passion one has the index of that society's loss of substance. For his part, Voegelin treats of such matters only in his

occasional papers and his letters, and never considered them the heart of a political philosopher's concern.

In case this detachment be thought unduly aloof for a political philosopher, it is worth remarking that the "Charter 77" theorists in Czechoslovakia, who are far from disengaged, strikingly echo Voegelin at this point. Rudolf Battek, for example, contrasts two ways of life: first, "the *spiritual* which includes ethical postulates, sensitive creation . . . learning and self-discovery in openness and progress, and the relevant concepts are: feeling, knowing, giving, learning, loving, believing. Second, by contrast, the *consumer* values (those having to do with . . . maintaining one's physical existence) include a preference for comfort, surplus, material wealth, and the relevant concepts are: having, getting, receiving and using" (Keane, 1985: 97-98). According to Battek, "consumer" considerations cannot be neglected, but only the "spiritual" orientation can satisfy human aspirations.

In his sense of proportion, Voegelin once again follows Plato. In the *Republic*, Plato thinks it worth assembling at least some institutional characteristics of the good polis: for example, those concerning the community of wives and children, and the selection, education and payment of the "Guardians". At the same time, he is indifferent whether the polis of the philosophers takes the form of a monarchy or an aristocracy. Socrates will not discuss details of civil or criminal law:

such legislative matters will take care of themselves if only the souls of the legislating rulers are in good order. . . . He considers it, on the contrary, a symptom of disease in a polis when the citizens are feverishly active with patching up this or that gap in the law, but do not dare to touch the well-known source of the multitude of minor evils (OH III: 87).

What Voegelin holds most influential about the "specifically totalitarian" model of industrial society is the primacy falsely attributed to it by intellectuals who have lost their sense of the spirit. Such false consciousness can nourish two opposite but similarly destructive errors which a sense of the metaxy would preclude: the belief that society can be transformed by means of the reform of institutions; and fatalism in face of the supposed "dispensation" those same institutions represent.

### Individual and Societal Consciousness'<sup>o</sup>

#### *The Reciprocity between Individual and Society*

Voegelin acknowledges such a phenomenon as collective consciousness: he speaks of "the self-interpretation of an early [cosmological] empire", and of the conversion which can "befall a society" (OH I: 7, 10). In *Anamnesis* he explains carefully that such locutions are

an abbreviated way of talking about the process by which concrete persons create a social field, i.e., a field in which their experiences of order are understood by other concrete men who accept them as their own and make them the motive of their habitual actions. Fields of this kind are called societies if their size and relative stability in time allows us to identify them. Since such fields are processes and not objects given once and for all, they manifest not only the processual characteristics of their founding and preservation but also those of resistance and mutation, of tradition and differentiating development, of ensuing rigidity and revolt, and so on, until their final decomposition and disappearance (An-E: 202).

"The social fields of concrete consciousness are not to be identified with organized societies", for the "civil theology" which sustains an organized society is only one among a plurality of social fields, which are not "personally and mutually exclusive". A fourth century Greek, for example, could be simultaneously "an Athenian

and a Hellene, a Sophist or philosopher, and a member of a mystery cult" (*Ibid*).

Now if "concrete persons create a social field", it is also the case that the social field forms concrete persons. For as was seen in Chapter Two. Voegelin holds that the individual psyche is related to the whole of reality both by intentionality and by "luminosity": that is, it is both creative and receptive (QH V: 14-16):

Reality, it is true, can move into the position of an object-of-thought intended by a subject-of-cognition, but before this can happen there must be a reality in which human beings with a consciousness occur. . . . man's consciousness is quite conscious of being constituted by the reality of which it is conscious (An-E: 10-11).

Although, in this text, Voegelin fails to mention society as a dimension of "comprehensive reality", the omission cannot be intended as significant. For when he later coins the term the "It-reality" (reality considered as all-embracing "subject", as against the "thing-reality", the world of objects), he writes that the It-reality "comprehends the partners in being, i.e. God and the world, man and society" (QH V: 16). Since society, like God, "the world" (the cosmic order), and "man" (the individual as a centre of consciousness), is a "partner in being" within comprehensive reality, it follows that luminosity of consciousness is, not least, receptivity towards society; that consciousness is thoroughly (though not unreciprocally or exclusively) constituted by society. ' '

Societal consciousness is expressed in language, in shared assumptions and conventions, in legal and political structures, and so forth. As individuals, we are both formed and constrained by the culture surrounding us, as well as acting on it. In so far as we resist some aspects of the culture, we have the resources to do so

only through the strength that comes to us, in part at least, through other aspects.'<sup>2</sup>

### *The Metaxic Tension in Society*

All cultures exist within the various metaxic tensions, including that between perfection and imperfection. As Voegelin explains in "Immortality: Experience and Symbol",

It is true, the balance of the tension can shift - personally, socially and historically - towards one or other of the poles . . . . Our present age, for instance, must be characterized as an age in which deficient existence, as well as its symbolic expression, is socially predominant. But social predominance of one pole does not abolish the other pole and together with it the tension. To speak of periods characterized by one of the poles to the exclusion of the other would be equivalent to saying that there are periods in the history of mankind characterized by the nonexistence of Man - though sometimes one is tempted to indulge in this fancy (1967a: 257).

It follows that the psyche is creatively formed by the best in its cultural environment, as well as deformed by the worst.

Naturally, the individual and collective judgments made of the wider society may swing towards towards either evaluative pole. So, for example, André Dumas suggests that ancient Greece and the biblical people had contrasting experiences of society. The ancient Greek is aware of dependence on the *polis*; but

his ideal is personal autonomy. Born in bonds he looks for independence. Old Testament man has just the opposite characteristics: menaced by isolation, he realizes his full vocation in the rediscovery, recognition and confession of his dependence on others (Dumas. 1978: 26).

Dumas regards the Hebrew Testament as the history of a "fratriarchy": that is, it concerns the forging of a shared relationship of equals under God, continually threatened by isolation on the one hand, and by



relationships of domination-submission on the other (*Ibid*: 24-46). To stand over against the community, even once personal consciousness had differentiated, was never seen by the Israelites as an ideal.

This contrast between the Greek and the biblical experience of "community" might be seen as paradigmatic. Raymond Plant notes the conflicting assessments of "community" made by different contemporary social theorists. It is frequently taken to connote a rich matrix of fulfilling relationships by which persons are respected in their wholeness rather than fragmented and identified with their social or economic functions. Its loss is lamented. Others, though, regard "community" as implying a stifling, coercive, illiberal environment from which individuals urgently need emancipation to attain personal autonomy (Plant: 1974: 13-36).

Though the respective weight given to positive and negative societal influence is infinitely variable, according to historical circumstances and individuals' own perspectives, the concept of the metaxy implies that "community" must always be at once both positively and negatively influential. In this way, the concept of the metaxy is a valuable critical tool, which can highlight false dissolutions of a necessarily perennial tension.

#### *Dissolving the Metaxic Tension*

In a famous passage of *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Reinhold Niebuhr proposed that every individual has the capacity to be superior to any possible society: "In every human group; there is less reason to guide and check impulse, less capacity for self-transcendence, less ability to comprehend the needs of others and therefore more unrestrained egoism than the individuals, who compose the group, reveal in their personal relationships" (Niebuhr, 1936: ix-x).

Now the metaxic principle we have quoted allows in principle that other relationships between society and the individual might obtain. And, indeed, one school of thought directly contradicts Niebuhr at this point. Anthony Quinton claims that "the fundamental principles of conservatism" express "a conviction of the radical intellectual imperfection of the human individual, as contrasted with the historically accumulated political wisdom of the community, as embodied in customs and institutions" (Quinton, 1978: 11). As Quinton puts it, "A radical innovation will have no instinctive emotional roots in the nature of those on whom it is imposed" (*Ibid*: 18). Such conservatives therefore regard laws and customs as the fruit of communal wisdom, and individuals who challenge the consensus as destructive. Indeed, Quinton calls the conservative attitude to traditional customs "quasi-religious" (*Ibid*: 19), and therefore accords them a numinous, "sacred" absoluteness. The individual's role is to respect and imbibe the culture; the intellectual must respect, imbibe and explicate it. Human activities (at least once they achieve the status of custom) are immune to rational criticism.<sup>13</sup>

But Quinton's argument for conservatism dissolves the metaxic tension in precisely the opposite way as Niebuhr does. Indeed, the argument seems incoherent for a reason that is germane to our discussion. As Voegelin has shown (An-E: 202, quoted above), social fields of consciousness do not coincide with the politically organized community. They and the traditions they preserve are plural. They both overlap and conflict with each other. One therefore requires some principle to discriminate among various traditions one inherits, and this principle obviously cannot itself be a "quasi-religious" respect for tradition. Otherwise, for instance, conservatives would have no right to criticize traditions uncongenial to them such as labour militancy. The individual, simply by virtue of

being a centre of consciousness, is *inalienably* in the position of passing judgment on society.<sup>14</sup>

Though Voegelin articulates a theory which helps to identify such oversimplifications, I wish to argue that in practice he himself also dissolves the metaxic tension. For when he comes to explain how the individual experiences society, he does so in terms of *pressure* not support. He writes that in Plato's *Republic*, "society is experienced as a psychic aggregate, exerting a pressure on the individual psyche, which man finds hard to resist" (OH III: 84). "Man is essentially social; to live in truth against appearance when the power of society is thrown on the side of appearance is a burden on the soul that is impossible to bear for the many, and hard to bear for the few." (*Ibid*: 79).<sup>15</sup>

In one way, such formulations are admirable. They give due weight to the power of social structures, while precluding any mechanistic conception of social reality. The constraints society undoubtedly imposes on us derive not from structures *as such*, but from the collective expectations (sometimes approaching the point of coercion) which are expressed through them. They derive, equally, from individuals' own predisposition to tolerate these constraints and to surrender all personal autonomy to the authority of groups and their leaders. And yet this predisposition is not fated. As Voegelin elsewhere insists, civilizational crisis "does not by any means have to be borne as an inevitable fate; on the contrary, everyone possesses the means of overcoming it in his own life". Everyone "is obliged to avoid this folly and live his life in order" (SPG: 22-23).<sup>16</sup>

But though they successfully avoid the trap of a determinist psychology, such formulations, at least when not balanced by others, contradict Voegelin's sense of society's embodiment of the metaxic tension between

perfection and imperfection, by consistently representing society at large as a threat to, not an enrichment of, the individual psyche. "To live one's life in order" virtually defines for him the philosopher's social relevance. But what is meant by the phrase is a dual attitude of openness to the transcendent order and resistance to the disorder of society, as in the case of Plato. Since evil cannot be extirpated from the historical polis, the existential search for justice by a philosopher (or by such a prophet as Jeremiah) shifts to a concern with "the trans-political politeia that is set up in heaven and will be realized in the soul of the beholder" (QH:III: 92).

Thus the philosopher is formed by participation in the transcendent, the "eminent reality", "the unlimited arche, the origin and ground of things" (QH IV: 216), and this participation, this response "to the theophanic event is personal, not collective" (Ibid: 217). One's immediate environment is always likely to be dominated by "folly". The classic philosophers

had no illusions about their role in the process of reality. They knew their range of participatory action to be limited to a sensitive alertness to disorder in personal and social existence, to their preparedness to respond to the theophanic event, and to their actual response (Ibid: 218).

And the situation of these classic philosophers remains paradigmatic for Voegelin:

One of the typical phenomena of the twentieth century is the event of spiritually energetic people breaking out of the dominant intellectual group in order to find the reality that has been lost (AM: 98).

As examples he gives Orwell, Camus and Thomas Mann, all of whom broke out from their ideologically tainted environments: he thinks their primary social resource was the community of great thinkers *of the past* who had not yet lost reality, or who were engaged in the effort of retaining it (Ibid). A polarity is therefore established

by which order emerges from the transcendent realm and disorder from the social environment. Otherwise, why should not the philosopher be required also to be sensitively alert to *order* in social existence?

One might ask whether society does not reflect in some measure the achievement or previous philosophers. Even in this respect, Voegelin is not sanguine. Of course, the philosopher's solitary insight is not without a certain social effect: "the evocation of right order and its reconstitution in his own soul becomes the substantive centre of a new community which, by its existence, relieves the pressure of the surrounding corrupt society" (OH III: 68, discussing Plato). However, the phrase "relieves the pressure" indicates that Voegelin scarcely expects such a community to *challenge* the dominant society. Elsewhere, writing that the response to theophany is "personal, not collective", he insists that the response creates "a new social field in history . . . wherever it spreads, it forms a cultural stratum within an ethnic society, though this stratum may be desperately thin and ineffectual": Aristotle "observed plaintively that there was no polis in which as many as one hundred mature men could be found" (OH IV: 217).<sup>17</sup>

Philosophy, therefore, does create its own social field of consciousness.<sup>18</sup> But this field may be so marginal as to have no effect on the main course of political life. Voegelin ends his essay "On Readiness to Rational Discussion" as follows:

Rational discussion on questions of social order is possible; and in a complicated modern society it is an essential condition of the social order. . . . The decisive manifestations of this loss [of the ability to reason] have been the mass and intellectual movements of our age. In this jungle of irrationality, rational discussion is confined to important but comparatively ineffectual enclaves. After centuries of systematic confusion of reason,

it will not be easy to render these enclaves once more effective. But that is the task which lies before us (Voegelin, 1961c: 283-84)<sup>19</sup>

It seems, then, that Voegelin is imaginatively preoccupied with the sort of civilizational crisis in which any attempt to carry on a public debate about the crisis itself is vitiated by the prevalent irrationality, the "systematic confusion of reason": in short, with what might be termed the "worst-case" situation, in which social viciousness can be resisted only by spiritual heroism. He says of the trilogy of Platonic dialogues *Thaeatetus-Sophist-Statesman* that "the hope for the regeneration of the polis through the spirit is gone, and the gulf between the condemned public order and the representatives of the spirit has become unbridgeable" (*Ibid*: 143). So "the great theme of *The Statesman* is formulated: the royal ruler in his struggle with an obstreperous society". In his wisdom such a ruler may seek the good of the polis unhampered by constitutional restraints (*Ibid*: 160, 159). Spiritual truth, and with it social authority, is removed from society at large.

But if the plurality of traditions and communities (which implies that the spiritual standing of tradition and community *as such* is indeterminate) counts against Quinton's brand of conservatism, it also counts against Voegelin; against his practical emphasis, if not against his formal theory. He might well be justified in writing from the experience (both Plato's experience, and his own) of struggling for reason in a vicious society. But such situations are not paradigms of the *intrinsic* relationship between the "psychic aggregate" of political society and the enclaves of spirit.

"God and man, world and society form a primordial community of being" (QH I: 1). With respect to this community of being, and therefore with respect to society

which is one of its partners, human consciousness is both intentional and luminous. Voegelin analyses many instances of the active, intentional, influence of the psyche on society, both for better and for worse. He also gives a full account of society's threatening pressure on the individual consciousness, which is one aspect of the luminosity of consciousness towards society. But he virtually disregards a relationship which is equally integral to the grid he postulates: that by which consciousness, including the philosopher's consciousness, is luminous towards society specifically in so far as society partakes of perfection as well as imperfection.

In fact, it is only by excluding from consideration actively beneficent societal influences that Voegelin's prescription for social betterment acquires any plausibility. He calls for

the restoration of spiritual substance in the ruling groups of a society, with the consequent restoration of the moral strength in creating a just social order (ER: 180).

This proposal is somewhat despairing, since he adds ruefully, that "the pragmatic value of this alternative, as experience has shown, is not very high". Plato, Nietzsche and Dostoevsky all failed to change their respective social orders. Nevertheless, "this is the true alternative" (*Ibid*). But it is an alternative which rests on a false opposition between individual wisdom and societal "folly".<sup>20</sup>

#### The Character of Social Order

The present argument, then, hinges on the claim that Voegelin wrongly posits noesis as the decisive cause of social order. This argument accepts that noesis is one indispensable cause of social order, but states two additional propositions, which Voegelin does not deny in

principle but which he neglects in practice. Therefore, these propositions in principle only complement Voegelin, but in effect correct him. It has already been argued, firstly, that social order underpins noesis, as well as rests on it. The second proposition will now be defended through two illustrative cases: that social order (as opposed to disorder) also rests on other foundations than noesis. In the first case Voegelin fails to follow through the implications of a Christian differentiation which he acknowledges to be genuine; in the second he diminishes the scope of concepts (Bergson's concepts of the "open society" and the "open soul") which he endorses.

#### *Reason and Love*

Voegelin quotes Aristotle's *Politics* to the effect that "friendship (*philia*) is the greatest good of the polis", and explains that, in order to be stable, a polis must be organized in such a manner that it becomes a network of diversified relations of friendship. Every human being is a centre, radiating relations of friendship in all directions in which community, however ephemeral, is possible with other human beings (OH III: 321).

For Aristotle, however, friendship consists in *homonoia*, in spiritual agreement, and can exist only between those who live in the *nous*. It follows, *a fortiori*, that friendship cannot exist between God and human beings (*Ibid*: 320-21; NSP: 77; cf. Aristotle, 1976: 258-74).

Now in *The New Science of Politics* Voegelin states firmly that Aristotle's position falls short of the Christian differentiation (though, he adds, "in reading Plato, one has the feeling of moving continuously on the verge of a breakthrough into this new dimension"): for Aquinas insists that there is a mutual *amicitia* between God and humankind (*Ibid*: 78). By a pleasing reversal of the order of Aristotle's reasoning, therefore, one may



infer that *amicitia* is possible between "unequal" human beings. And, indeed, in the "History of Political Ideas" Voegelin noticed Aquinas's description of humankind (in the *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, 117) as the *naturaliter animal sociale*, "naturally inclined to mutual love and helpfulness" (Hooy).

In principle, therefore, Voegelin recognizes the implications of the Christian "breakthrough".<sup>21</sup> In the important essay, "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme", he explains that "the dominant symbol expressing the revelatory force in the Christian visions is not the *nous* but the *pneuma tou theou*": *pneuma*, "the full meaning of the divine saving presence in history", had not been sufficiently articulated in classical philosophy.

Now St. Paul writes that as Christians we can even "rejoice in our sufferings" for "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (*Romans*, 5: 5). *Pneuma*, in other words, is the source of love as well as of revelation. Equally, love is itself revelatory. Voegelin, however, continues to regard *nous* as the ground of love, not love as the ground of *nous*. As he said in a lecture given in Toronto in 1965,

Since every man participates in love of the transcendent Being and is aware of such a ground - ground, reason or *nous* - out of which he exists, every man can, by virtue of this noetic self, have love for other men. In theory, this is the secondary phenomenon - in theory, not in practice. In practice, we love others right away without having a theory for it (*Conv*: 10).

"In theory", then (if, that is, we adverted fully to the matter), we would not love others unless we were aware that they, like us, have a noetic self which shares in the divine *nous*.

The more radical Christian perception is that, because the "Holy Spirit has been given to us", love is the

foundation for noesis, not only its corollary. The perception is classically expressed by St. Augustine when, in one of his treatises on St. John, he refers to the double command to love God and neighbour:

The love of God comes first in the order of command, but the love of neighbour comes first in the order of action. . . . You do not yet see God, but by loving your neighbour, you purify your eye for seeing God. . . . Love your neighbour, therefore, and observe the source of that love in you; there, as best you can, you will see God. . . . We have not yet reached the Lord, but we have our neighbour with us (cf. Augustine, 1954: 174-75, for Latin text).

Further, Augustine decisively distinguishes this love from that Aristotelian *philia* which is rooted in the *homonoia* of "equals". For he glosses the phrase "love your neighbour" in terms of the fifty-eighth chapter of *Isaiah*: "Share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house . . . .".

Two conclusions follow from Augustine's exposition of what Voegelin agrees to be the "Christian differentiation". Firstly, anyone (including a philosopher) who restricts the reception of divine revelation to the direct experience of the transcendent is not wholly open to revelation: for the love of neighbour is itself a prime source of *theophany*. Even speaking noetically, one's primary gift to others is not "pointing out the right way" to them, but loving them. Conversely, and decisively for our purpose, all of us (including the philosopher) are formed spiritually by those who do not necessarily enlighten us noetically. We receive as well as give love, and other people's love for us is theophanic, a constitutive source of our knowledge of God.

### *The Open Soul and The Open Society*

Voegelin appeals to Henri Bergson in support of his own understanding of the symbol of the "open soul":

The reality expressed by the *nous* symbols is the structure in the *psyche* of a man who is attuned to the divine order in the cosmos, not of a man who exists in revolt against it; reason has the definite existential content of openness towards reality in the sense in which Bergson speaks of *l'âme ouverte* (An-E: 97-98).

In his last book Voegelin again cites Bergson, through whom *l'âme ouverte* and *l'âme close* "allow us to speak unequivocally of the existential states of remembrance and oblivion" (OH V: 47; cf. also, *Conv*: 9).<sup>22</sup>

For Voegelin, the "open society" means the noetically open society. In "Immortality: Experience and Symbol" he notes that both scepticism and doctrinal literalism derive (in the manner of a falling-away) from truth previously experienced, and that spiritual outbursts occur as a response to "previous truth and its decline". "The history of mankind, thus, is an open society - Bergson's, not Popper's - comprehending both truth and untruth in tension" (Voegelin, 1967a: 256-57).<sup>23</sup>

Bergson, though, uses the terms "open" and "closed" society with a quite different intention. The closed society is any social group, however extensive, which invokes partisan loyalties in order to enhance its own cohesion, and which is therefore not inspired by the attraction of a universal unity or a universal morality. The open society is one that refuses to exclude any human group from its care and its moral horizon. It is mistaken to imagine that our sympathies tend to broaden out progressively towards universality, for "between the nation, however big, and humanity, there lies the whole distance from the finite to the infinite, from the closed to the open" (Bergson, 1935: 32). The open soul, by analogy, is the one which "embraces all humanity", even, perhaps, the whole of created reality, without its charity being thereby exhausted (*Ibid*: 38).

It is true that Bergson thinks this openness requires an orientation to transcendent reality. Love for family and "fellow-countrymen" is natural and direct, says Bergson, "whereas love of mankind is indirect and acquired" and we come to it "by roundabout ways; for it is only through God, in God, that religion bids man love mankind". But this "religion" is constituted not by noesis, but by the Spirit's being poured into our hearts. Philosophical reason can also reveal "the right of all to command respect", but only given what Aristotle and Plato would hardly allow, that we can speak of "reason in whose communion we are all partakers". It is only as we experience reason in *other people* that we discover it to be the essential attribute of humanity (*Ibid*: 33, 68).<sup>24</sup>

It is true, also, that Bergson has a place for "the select", for mystics. But Bergson's account of them differs sharply from Voegelin's. Whereas the morality of a closed society is inculcated by pressure and the force of obligation, and is reducible to "impersonal formulae", "complete and perfect morality" is embodied in great moral personalities and "has the effect of an appeal" (*Ibid*: 34). Once again, such mystics will inevitably be open to the transcendent. But they are *defined* not by their contemplative orientation, but by

the bent for action, the faculty of adapting and re-adapting oneself to circumstances, in firmness combined with suppleness, in the prophetic discernment of what is possible and what is not, in the spirit of simplicity which triumphs over complications, in a word, supreme good sense (*Ibid*: 228).

It is clear that Bergson's conception of "openness" is far broader than Voegelin's.<sup>25</sup> As long as the focus remains fixed on *nous*, one may envisage the philosopher as mediating truth to the wider society - to the limited extent to which that society can bear it. But to focus on the human "bent for action" and, especially, on the human capacity for unrestricted love gives different

results. Firstly, the "select" are not confined to an enclave of philosophers (in ideal circumstances, socially dominant), but are indefinitely and anonymously diffused throughout society at large: secondly, as I have already argued independently, even the authentic philosopher is in no way separate from society.

As a matter of fact, the individual and society are implied in each other: individuals make up society by their grouping together; society shapes an entire side of individuals by being prefigured in each of them (Bergson, 1935: 199).

In particular, philosophers receive from society quite as much as they contribute to it. As Bergson asks, "Would the philosophers themselves have laid down so confidently the principle, so little in keeping with everyday experience, of an equal participation of all men in a higher essence, if there had not been mystics to embrace all humanity in one simple, indivisible love?" (*Ibid*: 234).<sup>26</sup>

### Conclusions

Having considered the relationship of social structures to consciousness, and of individual consciousness to the "psychic aggregate" of society, we now consider the implications of our argument for political theology and for the evaluation of Voegelin's own thought.

#### *Political Theology*

According to Segundo, as we saw in Chapter One, liberation theology characteristically begins from the standpoint of "suspicion", and in particular from the suspicion that "everything involving ideas, including theology" is bound up, consciously or unconsciously, with the "existing social situation" (1977: 8). From her European perspective, similarly, Sölle regards political theology as a corrective to that privatized theology which, it is suspected, has the latent function of promoting the churches' accommodation to existing social

practices (e.g. 1974: 33-39). Such a function would be no less culpable for being unconscious: "Before the bar of nature and fate, unconsciousness is never accepted as an excuse; on the contrary there are very severe penalties for it" (Jung, 1971: 31).

Both schools of political theology are "not concerned with conferring an aura of sanctity on politics as much as with questioning and demystifying the political sphere": for the "subversive memory" of Jesus "challenges all established order and disturbs complacency" (Forrester, 1988: 59; cf. also Fierro, 1977: 23-28).

I do not argue that this position is false. Political theology so conceived has a close affinity with what Voegelin regards as philosophy's character of resistance to the disorder which threatens to invade or corrupt the individual psyche. What is more, it takes up central aspects of the prophetic tradition and of the witness of Jesus.<sup>27</sup>

In particular, theological reflection might properly start from the experience of crisis or destruction, or from one's perception that some social group was being victimized. In fact, given such experiences, theology had better start there, for no theology is permitted to overlook the evil of which it is poignantly aware.<sup>28</sup>

But our account of social reality, while recognizing the disorder which is present there (e.g. the "specifically totalitarian" characteristics which Voegelin attributes to industrial society) has insisted that society and social institutions can also embody love, grace and excellence, and mediate them to individuals. This experience must also generate its political theology; for theology can flow from any experience.

If political theology allows itself to become dominated by the task of "unmasking" societal evil, if it is not also able to root itself in some experience of society's vitality and nourishment of individual life, it will become itself an expression of alienation, not a critique of it. In particular, the rhetoric of "radical change" could manifest a destructive oblivion to the "psychic aggregate" which social institutions express.<sup>29</sup>

To caution against a possible exaggeration is not to suggest that it is endemic to political theology. For example, Gutiérrez (1973: 6-11) roots theology, as a "critical reflection on praxis", in certain positive insights and experiences: those of charity as the centre of Christian life, of "spirituality" as a less restricted realm than had been supposed, and of an increased openness to the anthropological and historical aspects of revelation.<sup>30</sup>

### *Voegelin's Thought*

I have accepted Voegelin's argument that *in so far as* societal institutions constrain us, they do so not through their intrinsic facticity but through their channelling of human purposes, decisions and aspirations. But I have drawn on his own writings to argue against the negative index he attaches to society at large, maintaining that society embodies the same metaxic tensions and potentialities as does the individual psyche.

Now, Voegelin's emphasis on what we have called the "worst-case" situation is readily understandable. We began this study by noting that it was his experience of "overwhelming political reality" that first drove him to philosophy (An-E: 3). The continuing intense experience of a drastically "closed" society (in both his own and Bergson's sense), especially as a young but established

scholar in the 1930s, seems to have been so intense as to dominate his lifelong political perceptions.

A vivid example is furnished by his three-page paper entitled "The Totalitarian Climate" (Hoov).<sup>31</sup> He wishes to explain that Nazi persecution is more systematic and even more brutal than is indicated by the lurid reports reaching the U.S.A. It is designed to create terror even among those not immediately the victims of the atrocities. As he recalls,

After the Germans had invaded my country in March, 1938, I had to stay in Vienna still for several months. I remember very well that every time the door-bell sounded, I looked around my desk for the mail which had come in the morning, for notes which I had taken, for an address which I had put down, in order to shove everything dangerous quickly in the stove and burn it, because the caller might be a Gestapo man - and once it was a Gestapo man who had come to search my home. I am perfectly healthy, but in those weeks I developed insomnia because of nervous heart-attacks; they ceased as soon as I was in Switzerland.

Of course, matters were much worse for Jews. Voegelin mentions a few of "the hundreds of cases which are known to me personally". To cite only one:

A Jewish physician who knew that he would lose his job within a few weeks was lucky enough to find a position abroad. When he secured it, he resigned his job in the hospital. As soon as he had resigned he was put in jail for sabotage. When he came out half a year later the position abroad was gone.

Voegelin comments: "Behind the individual cases there is a state of mind which produces them". It was manifestly pointless or impossible to challenge details of the system which inspired the terror. So Nazi tyranny became for him the exemplary instance of his belief that in an evil time, institutional reform is secondary to the recovery of order in the soul.<sup>32</sup>

While respecting Voegelin's own intense experience, one can still criticize his manner of making it normative for political philosophy. Our argument has brought into



question what was called his "sense of proportion", derived from Plato. His suggestions for the reorganization of political institutions, as we saw, smacked of what became the policies of the post-war British Labour Government, so must have looked distinctly radical when voiced in 1939 in the U.S.A. But he made them almost in passing, and clearly thought that they should not be the primary focus of politicians' preoccupations or the public' solicitude.<sup>33</sup>

The truth in this contention is that immediate acts of institutional reform of themselves and in the absence of changed attitudes, can have little lasting effect, and might even rebound on themselves. For example, the attempt to reserve all economic decisions to government in the name of "the common good" seems inevitably to spawn a black-market economy: similarly, the apparent institutional gains of a political movement might only precipitate a swing towards its opponents. Thus we accepted the weaker of the two possible interpretations of Voegelin's position which were outlined at the beginning of this chapter: there is no social transformation "independent of the life of the soul". Perhaps, indeed, this contention would attract dissent only from thorough-going materialists.

But we have argued that Voegelin adopted a stronger position, that there is no social transformation other than that of the psyche (individual or collective), that transformation is a word which applies without remainder to the level of spirit. In the concluding chapter of *The Ecumenic Age* he writes that the discovery of the Ground does not condemn the field of existing things to irrelevance but, on the contrary, establishes it as the reality that derives the meaning of its existence from the ground (QH IV: 324).

In other words, the created order, including the political order, is meaningful, *because it is created* and so

points beyond itself. Unfortunately, he does not also assert its meaning *as creation*, as something to be seen for itself as well as seen through, so that "living one's life in order" requires the effort of "co-creation" as well as that of contemplative attention.

But on his own principle that social structures express a "psychic aggregate", any act of institutional reform itself has both pragmatic and "spiritual" dimensions. If institutions bear meanings (as Voegelin allows), then the strenuous effort to change them for the better also bears meaning: further, it follows that psyche *must* find expression in either sustaining or altering structures. The very search for meaning is enfeebled when the effort of shaping societal institutions is simply delegated to "technicians".

Voegelin asserts that concrete injustices can be righted only as a consequence of the prior restoration of spiritual substance to ruling groups is restored. One must also insist that the spiritual substance of ruling groups cannot be restored, nor deficient existence remedied, without a concrete commitment to the removal of actual injustices. This corrective principle is illustrated in Martin Buber's account of the "utopian socialist", Gustav Landauer. Landauer asks how one can invoke the spirit in an unspiritual time, and replies that it is the very attempt at the realization of new and appropriate social structures that makes room for the spirit (Buber, 1958: 53-54). It follows that the spirit is emphatically not reserved to those who withdraw from the struggle to contemplate, and to point out the right way from that perspective of disengagement.

The practical consequence of orientation to the transcendent may be expressed through Paul Halmos's concept of "equilibration" (1978: 12-13, 38-45). Halmos is concerned with the practice of social work, and the

need to attend both to the personal care of sufferers and to the political factors which exacerbate suffering or inhibit healing. It is wrong, he argues, to define either task in terms of the other; and equally wrong to seek some stable synthesis of the two tasks. One must attempt strenuously to maintain the tension between the two poles. Equally the tension between action and noetic contemplation must not be dissolved by making contemplation intrinsically prior. It has to be "equilibrated".

CHAPTER EIGHT  
HISTORICAL HOPE AND ESCHATOLOGICAL HOPE

John Macquarrie (1978: 86-105) offers a typology of the different tensions which are felt within the Christian experience of hope: (1) between individual and social conceptions of eschatological hope; (2) between hope directed within and hope directed beyond historical experience; (3) between evolutionary and revolutionary understandings of hope; (4) between appeals to the present and to the future as the eschatological moment. In order to explore what Voegelin and political theology might offer to each other, this chapter will consider the second of these tensions, though the other tensions will also be glimpsed incidentally.

The question of what can be hoped for, of course, has preoccupied thinkers throughout the ages: though one can reasonably look to such a philosopher as Voegelin for illumination, one will hardly demand a breakthrough or a *decisive* insight.' On his account, firstly, historical existence is neither random nor futile but shares in the eschatological direction of reality. It follows that in so far as the eschaton is a realm of fulfilment, history somehow shares in that fulfilment, and therefore that hope is not misplaced when directed towards history. But secondly, he offers a rigorous analysis of certain dubious articulations of experience of hope which, he thinks, have tainted Christian life: one is an emphasis on the directional movement of history so strong as to obscure the necessary sense of its metaxic structure; the other is the secular ideology of progress.

But it will be argued that, compared with political theology, Voegelin unduly restricts the range of an appropriate historically directed hope, in particular by limiting it to one dimension of human experience, the noetic and not the political.

#### Reality as Directional

Voegelin explains that classical philosophy and Christian thought both discern that the flux of historical reality is neither random nor cyclical but has a directional structure. Following Anaximander, he posits two modes of being in reality. There is "eminent reality" (which is symbolized in two ways, as the *Arche*, "the origin and ground of things", and the *Apeiron*, the "Beyond" or the "Boundless"); and there is a "limited thinghood" which both originates in and returns to the "eminent reality" (OH IV: 216). "There is a difference of rank between the two modes of being, with the *Apeiron* being 'more real' than the things."

The *Apeiron* and the things are not two different realities in a static relationship one toward the other; they are experienced as modes of being, or as poles of a tension within the one, comprehensive reality. Reality in this comprehensive sense is experienced as engaged in a movement of transcending itself in the direction of eminent reality (*Ibid*).

Reality is moving, in other words, "toward a state undisturbed by forces of disorder; and the imagination, following the directional movement, will express its goal by such symbols of transfigured reality as 'a new heaven and a new earth'" (*Ibid*: 239). Further it is only such a revelation of directional movement which can constitute meaning in history.

Directionality implies some goal, some point or state of consummation. The directional movement, however, is necessarily a mystery to us: as Voegelin writes, the event of consummation, "as it can happen at

any time, hangs as a threat or hope over every present. In fact, nothing happens; and yet it might happen" (*Ibid*). Anxiety over present disorders and one's own vulnerability to them, however, can cause one's sense of the *mystery* of consummation to be repressed, and

can engender the vision of a divine intervention that will put an end to disorder in time for all time. . . . The aura of possibility surrounding the mystery can be condensed into an expectation, with certainty, of a transfiguring event in a not too distant future (*Ibid*: 239, 240).

Now Voegelin considers that St. Paul advanced beyond Plato in his keen awareness of the goal and of the directional dynamic of reality. Correspondingly, the Pauline writings concentrate less on the structure of metaxic reality itself than "on the divine irruption which constitutes the new existential consciousness" (*Ibid*: 246). When Paul articulates the tension of historical existence it is precisely in terms of the expectation of deliverance from the fate of "perishing" (*phthora*) into the freedom and glory of the children of God (*Romans* 8: 18-25). Like all differentiations, however, this Pauline one introduces new possibilities of intellectual distortion. Specifically, the sense that reality has an eschatological direction may contract into a confidence that an historically immanent deliverance might be progressively experienced.

Paul himself does not take this false step. Though his expectation is expressed in "hope" (*elpis*), this hope is not separable from a readiness to wait with *hypomone* ("patience" or "endurance"), because "our salvation is not in sight".<sup>2</sup> But Voegelin thinks that the Christian movement as a whole lacked Paul's restraint, and that, as was seen in Chapter Four, it compares badly with "classic philosophy" in that it is "more unbalanced through its apocalyptic ferocity, which leads to conflicts with the conditions of man's existence in society" (1971a: 77).

Much earlier, in his letter of 1953 to Alfred Schutz, he went so far as to distinguish within historic Christianity "two main components", which he called "the gnosis of historical eschatology" and "essential Christianity" respectively:

a historical society can indeed derive little hope of survival from a religious attitude based on the assumption that the world will end tomorrow and that social order is entirely irrelevant. If there were no more to Christianity than this radical eschatological expectation, it would never have become a power in history; the Christian communities would have remained obscure sects which could always be wiped out in the event that their foolishness seriously threatened the order of the state. But precisely because this evaluation is correct, I consider it fantastic to see the essence of Christianity in this destructive component, while dismissing as unessential the Church's factual evolution into an historical power (Opitz & Sebba, 1981: 452-53).

This passage moves from rightly distinguishing two components to tendentiously condemning one of them. In this way the "Pauline compromises" become not simply consonant with Christianity but its "essence": the recognition of the legitimacy of the imperfect social order, and "the transformation of the faithful living in eschatological expectation into the historical *corpus Christi mysticum* (*Ibid*). Voegelin's description of this second "compromise" is revealing, for it suggests that he wrongly polarizes what are complementary strands of Christian consciousness. The mystical body must *also* live in eschatological expectation, and one must not posit some "essence" of Christianity from which eschatological expectation is excised. Similarly, the necessity for patience and endurance in the face of the social order does not simply entail accommodation to it. Voegelin's endorsement of "essential Christianity" *over against* "eschatological gnosis" actually forfeits the Pauline differentiation. It does so because it represents expectation as a matter of *gnosis* not faith.

Hope and Faith

Paul's "awareness" of reality belongs to faith not "knowledge" (*gnosis*). But, as we have observed in this study, Voegelin holds that faith (and not *gnosis*) is also the true medium of philosophical reason.<sup>3</sup> In fact, reason itself is grounded in faith. That is, reason is grounded in a search to escape "ignorance": "Since the search is not a blind desire but rather contains the component of insight, we may characterize it as knowing questioning and questioning knowledge" (An-E: 148). As Eugene Webb explains, "One could not seek the truth of anything in particular unless one already had, as a primary source of orientation, a sense of what truth as such is" (1983: 359-60).

When explaining what he means by faith, Voegelin commonly appeals to *Hebrews*, 11:1: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the proof of things unseen" (e.g. 1967a: 235, 1968b: 34). At the beginning of "Deformations of Faith", an unpublished lecture of 1977, he explains that the Greek word for "proof" in this verse, *elenchos*, lacks any connotation of formal logic, but is a stronger term than, say, "conviction": accordingly, Voegelin understands faith as a "persuasive force" in the experience of reality. Faith discerns that the truest reality is not that of phenomena, but lies precisely in what is unseen (ἄορα): therefore, in what cannot be the object of *gnosis*.

Such faith is not a merely "subjective" experience, but is "the entering of the soul into divine reality through the entering of divine reality into the soul" (OH I: 130). Further, as Voegelin later writes, faith is always marked by a "reflective distance" from its own articulations: anyone engaged in the quest for truth can become conscious of the *structure* of the quest,



can be conscious of his state of ignorance concerning true order and be aware that a consciousness of ignorance presupposes the apprehension of something knowable beyond his present state of knowledge (OH V: 40).<sup>4</sup>

It is important for the argument of this chapter to note that, as the verse from *Hebrews* suggests, faith and hope always intersect: for example, endurance in the quest is itself both the sign and the fruit of hope. In words which Moltmann quotes from Calvin's *Institutes*, hope is "the inseparable companion of faith", and hope "is nothing else than the expectation of those things which faith has believed to be truly promised by God" (1967: 20). Karl Rahner, likewise, speaking of "hoping belief", implies that neither hope nor faith can stand without the other (1975: 84-93, especially p. 88).

There is, however, one integral dimension of faith, expounded by Martin Buber (1951: 24-29, 36-42), which Voegelin fails to discuss. Taking Jesus's injunction to "turn and believe in the message" (*Mark* 1: 15), Buber comments that faith is associated with *Teshuvah*, the turning of the whole person:

It must further be noticed that the conception [of faith] includes the two aspects of a reciprocity of permanence: the active, "fidelity", and the receptive, "trust" (*Ibid*: 29).

Accordingly, when Buber considers *Hebrews* he insists that the "conviction of things unseen" is not a mere belief in the *existence* of God (which was a truism to the Israelites), but is a realization of the *presence* of God to oneself and of one's own proper relationship to God:

For Israel - according to its mode of faith - everything is dependent upon making its faith effective as actual trust in God. One can "believe that God is" and live at His back; the man who trusts him lives in His face. Trusting can only exist at all in the complete actuality of the *vita humana* (*Ibid*: 40).<sup>5</sup>

If hope and faith are inseparable, it seems likely that any conception of faith which neglects the aspect of fidelity (faithful action, therefore, as well as belief) will lead to a conception of *what can be hoped for* which excludes the fruits of faithful action and is limited to the fruits of the noetic quest.

### Historical Optimism

To be conscious of the directional dynamic of reality is to accept that one's consciousness, too, has an orientation to the future. There is, indeed, a dimension of consciousness which focuses contemplatively on the present, but it remains true that decisions and actions, because they are not merely haphazard thrusts into a void, always express positive or negative expectations of the future. In other words, there arises the question of hope or its lack; and to speak of a "lack" is to posit not only an absence, but the absence of something that had better be present.

#### *The Case of Ernst Bloch*

Now it is possible that a person's sense of the "directionality" of reality may be wholly immanent in character, in which case hope will have to take the form of meliorism, of a confidence (however carefully qualified) in "progress": progress not merely up to the present, but also onward from the present. To illustrate this point, we shall consider the Marxist thinker, Ernst Bloch, whose influence on political theologians has been far-reaching.<sup>6</sup>

Part Two of Bloch's vast work, *The Principle of Hope*, is entitled "Anticipatory Consciousness": by this phrase Bloch means a consciousness of the "Not-Yet" which, as he contends, drives all human endeavour. Much of his criticism is directed against what he regards as failures to

recognize that consciousness is *essentially* future-directed.<sup>7</sup>

Though it is beyond the scope of this study to offer a thorough critique of Bloch, it is necessary to reject his identification of "future-consciousness" as the "essence" of consciousness. For Christian faith, at least, cannot forget its past without forfeiting even its future identity.<sup>8</sup>

Now, "anticipatory consciousness", as was seen in Chapter One, might well be dominated by fear or foreboding, not by hope. But in Bloch's case the character of such consciousness is determined by two convictions: that an historical fulfilment can be achieved by human effort, and that there is no fulfilment which transcends history. Recalling the contrast between "this age and the age to come" (*Matthew* 12: 32; 24:3) he states,

What is intended by these contrasting terms is not a geographical division between this world and the other world, but a *chronologically successive one in the same arena, situated down here* (1986: 500, author's emphasis; cf. also, 1265-74, 1283-98).

It is true that Bloch attacks "the banal, automatic belief in progress as such", but what he opposes to it is "militant optimism", which refuses to dissociate the anticipated future from work towards it:

It is the revolutionary decision of the proletariat which today commits itself to the final struggle of liberation, a decision of the subjective factor in alliance with the objective factors of economic-material tendency (*Ibid*: 199).

Bloch recognizes that there is a question how far this "militant optimism" is even conceivable.<sup>9</sup> So he offers a typology of historical possibility (*Ibid*: 224-41), of which the fourth and most substantial type is the one most relevant to our enquiry. This, the *objectively-real Possible*, refers to "the future-laden definiteness in the real itself". "The Real Possible begins with the seed

in which what is coming is inherent". This future remains a possibility, not a necessity, since present reality does not determine any single future: but it is a "concrete" possibility. Bloch then illustrates what he means by "concrete":

According to the most concrete of all Marx's anticipations, the essence of the perfectible is "the naturalization of man, the humanization of nature" (*Ibid*: 240).

What is concretely possible, then, is "the abolition of alienation in man and nature, between man and nature". When Bloch returns to the subject, he argues that Marx's anticipation is concrete precisely because "actual descriptions of the future are deliberately missing", so that the future is not "pictured in a utopian-abstract way" but is "comprehended" (*Ibid*: 621). In Marx,

the "categorical imperative" first became and becomes accomplishable: namely to "overturn all circumstances in which man is a degraded, a subjugated, a forsaken, a contemptible creature"; what is best in utopia is given a firm, practical footing (*Ibid*: 622).

To turn "lack of specificity" into a synonym for (and virtually a guarantee of) "concreteness" is a remarkable and impudent step. The book's final chapter is replete with similar rhetoric: Marx is "unsurpassable", the unadulterated Marx is "*humanity actively comprehending itself*", Marxism "is absolutely nothing but the struggle against the dehumanization which culminates in capitalism until it is completely wiped out" (*Ibid*: 1357, 1358, author's emphasis).

Now, Bloch is quite aware that "anticipatory consciousness" can be fulfilled only subject to what he calls the "aporias of realization". In other words, as soon as any conceivable historical future becomes the present, it is logically bound to share in the defectiveness of all conceivable experiences of the present. Such a logical necessity, however, might be obscured from

the imagination by the future's intrinsic indeterminacy *as future*. As Bloch writes, there is always a "still unattained aspect in the realizing element which primarily also overshadows the Here and Now of something realized" (1986: 189, 193). Yet, realizing this, he offers no argument for exempting the Marxist realization from such an aporia - except by rhetorically categorizing the "objectively-real Possible" as concrete, universal, firm and practical. Bloch's view of the Marxist future, then, is itself characterized by a kind of "quasi-faith", in that it goes beyond what is logically entailed by historical evidence: true faith, though is not wilfully blind to its own character *as faith*.<sup>10</sup>

This discussion is relevant to our purpose, because of Bloch's influence on certain political theologians. Most obvious is the acceptance of that exclusive future-mindedness, which has just been criticized. Metz writes, "The modern man's understanding of the world is fundamentally oriented toward the future. His mentality *therefore* is not primarily contemplative but operative" (1969: 83; emphasis added to draw attention to the logical oddity of the "therefore"). Again,

The golden age lies not behind us, but before us: it is not re-created in the memories of our dreams, but created in the desires of our imagination and heart. Man's relationship to the past becomes increasingly a mere aesthetic, romantic and archaic interest, and by his archival curiosity for the past he acknowledges the past as something antiquated (*Ibid*: 83-84; see also the continuation to p. 87).

Secondly, in Chapter One we noted the contrast drawn by Metz's between God's "future" and human "goals" and that drawn by Moltmann between the divine *avenir* and the human *futur*. These contrasts suggest (wrongly as it was argued) that the divine future was not, in history, subject to the aporias of realization.

A third instance is that of the "eschatological proviso", also mentioned in Chapter One, by which a theologian will take up a critical (though not necessarily a negative) position with regard to the societal present by affirming a transcendent horizon. Now Fierro considers this proviso to be a mere device by which theologians project into the minds of non-believers their own absolutizing tendencies. Secular political movements are "well aware of their own relativity and finiteness". Given the frequency with which Fierro refers to Bloch's writings in *The Militant Gospel* this is a curious assessment, for Fierro must know that Bloch exhibits no such restraint. What is more, Fierro's own judgment on political movements expresses an unmitigated confidence which eschews all qualification:

The modern versions of utopia are part of social theory, entailing a critical theory of society and knowledge of different historical alternatives. They are part of a rational and scientific discourse, . . . [and are a] methodical invention of new societal forms (1977: 283-84).

Not only does this assessment fail to be "critical": since Fierro proposes a theology which depends on the hypothesis of historical materialism (1977: 364), it is odd to find him here assuming that societal forms can be "invented".<sup>11</sup>

### *The Ideology of Progress*

To consider Voegelin's critique of the doctrine of progress as it was developed by the philosophers of the French Enlightenment will offer us an avenue of approach to the question of what is a theologically sound hope for the historical future. His fullest consideration of the matter occurs in *From Enlightenment to Revolution*, a book noteworthy for his incisive use of the source materials.<sup>12</sup>

As Christopher Dawson says of the French Enlightenment, "while the new philosophy had no place for the supernaturalism of the Christian eschatology, it could not divest itself of the Christian teleological conception of life": and he cites the Abbé de St. Pierre's confidence that the "perpetual and unlimited augmentation of the universal human reason" would quite soon produce a golden age, paradise on earth (1931; 190-91). It may be seen, then, that the doctrine of progress in its most explicit form reveals the same combination of ideas that we have found in Bloch: an explicitly immanentist "future-mindedness", plus a willingness to exempt some given historical development from the "aporias of realization".

In Voegelin's view, such expectations presume that the constitution of being itself can be altered. His discussion in *ER* seeks to show that every intellectual who aspires to change the world will inevitably "construct a world picture from which those essential features of the constitution of being that would make the programme appear hopeless and foolish have been eliminated" (*SPG*: 100). The "faith" of such thinkers relies on their closing themselves to whole realms of truth and experience, just as those Christians who were lured into the "gnosis of historical eschatology" neglected the metaxic structure of the world. The intellectual and political consequences are equally catastrophic.

In the case of Helvetius (1715-71), for example, confidence in progress is the fruit of a psychological theory according to which persons are dominated by the passion of *amour de soi*, the "guarantee that pleasures are procured and pain avoided" (*ER*: 46-47). Voegelin argues that this psychology is crudely reductionist. For Augustine, *amor sui* cannot be understood except as a passion which must be subjected (by grace) to *amor Dei*. It is *amor Dei* which leads to human fulfilment.

Helvétius treats the *amour de soi* as autonomous, as the decisive component of human nature. Persons are morally neutral, they invariably follow their interest and are not to be blamed for this.

It follows that social order can only come about as legislators subordinate private interests to the *utilité publique* (*Ibid*: 47-48, 61). Helvétius's confident expectation of social progress derives from his belief that the public interest can be (indeed, in the long run, *must* be) decisive:

If we consider that the power essentially resides in the greatest number, and that justice consists in the practice of actions useful to the greatest number, then it is evident that justice, by nature, is always equipped with the necessary power to suppress vice and to compel men to be virtuous (*ER*: 61).

"Under a good legislation", therefore, "only the fools would be vicious" (*Ibid*: 49). Thus as Voegelin remarks, "the analyst-legislator arrogates to himself the possession of the substance of the good society while denying it to the rest of mankind" (*Ibid*: 51). As Voegelin's reader is left to infer, any advance in the *utilité publique* will exact a high price.<sup>13</sup>

The objective arrogance of the "analyst-legislator" hardened further (*Ibid*: 75-88). According to the *Encyclopédie*, the Enlightenment was itself the goal of all previous human progress. Only now that prejudice was overcome could philosophy be systematized: and no one need subsequently consult the philosophers supplanted by the *Encyclopédie*. Diderot, in his prospectus for the *Encyclopédie*, claimed yet more. Even future discoveries could only supplement, never falsify, the new insights. The *Encyclopédie* is consecrated as the authoritative point of reference, for the future as well as the past.

With his discussion of Turgot, we reach the heart of Voegelin's argument. To his credit, Turgot (1727-81) is



willing to define what he means by intellectual progress, namely the "critical purification of science from anthropomorphisms". But, Voegelin goes on, "taken in itself, the emergence of mathematized science has no connection with the problem of meaning in history" (*Ibid*: 91). What occurs in the emergence of science is not an unqualified advance, but only a transfer of intellectual energy "from speculation on substance to the science of phenomena" (*Ibid*: 115). The concept of progress becomes an ideology as soon as "purification from anthropomorphisms" is taken as the criterion of value in other fields than those based on mathematical physics; or when "the evolution of mathematical physics, however valuable and progressive in itself, is uncritically used as the criterion of the value or progress of a civilization" (*Ibid*: 91).<sup>14</sup>

In addition to the "critical purification of anthropomorphisms", however, Turgot posited a general process of progress of the kind we have called "meliorism", marked by "the softening of the mores, the enlightenment of the mind, and the intensified commerce between formerly isolated nations to the point of global intercourse". The advance is frequently interrupted, and many people do not participate in it: nevertheless, "*la masse totale*" moves towards ever-increasing perfection" (*Ibid*: 92, 93).<sup>15</sup>

The notion of an advancing "*masse totale*" is a difficult one. By definition it cannot refer exclusively to those few people who, in Turgot's view, are the carriers of the human advance. Nor, since Turgot excludes some people from the advance, can it refer to the human race as such. Accordingly, Voegelin suggests that the symbol "is the tentative evocation of a new worldly divinity" (*Ibid*: 94). That is, the phrase embodies not an empirical idea, but a "political idea" of the kind which we discussed in Chapter Three: it articulates the desire for a wholly immanent salvation and, by

so doing, seeks to forge the the very collectivity it might be taken to designate.<sup>16</sup>

Some of Voegelin's most impassioned pages (ER: 125-35) are given to the analysis of the posthumously published *Esquisse d'un Tableau Historique des Progrès de l'Esprit Humain* of Condorcet (1743-94). It is "consciously a work of the progressivist apostolate", "an authoritative summary of the creed of the community", written when Condorcet was in hiding under threat of the guillotine. Condorcet was a mathematician and wished to apply the recently developed calculus of probability to social phenomena. Society is "a mathematical mass with calculable and predictable features", and it follows that an adequately skilled "Directorate" will be competent to devise and direct a programme of human advancement.

The *Esquisse* epitomizes the doctrine of progress. It illegitimately imports the methodology of mathematized science into socio-political discourse: it fixes the dogma of progress for mass consumption: and even as it assumes (following Helvétius) that wisely altruistic legislators will be at hand, it unwittingly manifests how grotesque are the consequences of such an assumption. For the *Esquisse* licenses the Directorate, animated by its "universal philanthropy" and adopting the "war cry: *reason, tolerance and humanity*", to use any method, however ruthless or dishonest, of extirpating "all crimes of fanaticism and tyranny" (*Ibid*: 128, 129; Voegelin's emphasis).<sup>17</sup>

Voegelin's forceful attack on Condorcet is of special importance, for its implications extend far beyond the particular case. By reversing its terms we can identify his own most profound convictions. Condorcet has unwittingly indicted himself as one who

can make the innocent believe that they enter into the truth if they accept faithfully as dogma a

proposition which no conscientious thinker would accept without far-reaching qualifications, who create in their victims the belief that instruction is education, who destroy intellectual honesty through their separation of results from the critical processes which lead up to them, who build up in the masses the unshakeable brutality of ignorant conviction . . . . (*Ibid*: 126-27).

From his examination of the French "progressivist" thinkers, therefore, Voegelin concludes that progress is an intelligible concept only within a specific field of enquiry or endeavour, where definite criteria can be given to assess it. The same social process can be beneficent from one perspective but destructive from another. Technological advances, for example, might, without ceasing to be advances, allow trained human sensitivities to atrophy, and also exacerbate social inequality as power is concentrated in fewer hands. Finite lines of meaning (of growth, decay, recovery) can still be traced in history. But the idea of *progress as such* is incoherent. The incoherent idea, unfortunately, is also effective as a destructive ideological folly which threatens dire consequences, especially when it is pursued with what Bloch calls "militant optimism".<sup>18</sup>

#### Historical Pessimism and Anti-Optimism

Two different positions oppose historical optimism.

Firstly one might share "anticipatory consciousness", but anticipate deterioration. This position can be called historical pessimism. It is advocated in "Prepare to Meet thy Doom", a brief, slightly bizarre essay by the philosopher Ernest Gellner which he calls "a sermon on the ambivalences of progress, reason, liberty, equality and fraternity" (1974: 1-7). Against the "sloppy indulgence" of those "who, though no longer sure, at least think that the world might turn out well", Gellner contends that "any future counts as disastrous, in terms

of our present visions of the alternatives". He will "positively prove that there can be no justified hope". On the contrary, "*whatever* happens is bound to be no good" (*Ibid*: 1, author's emphasis). By pointing to a simple tautology, he will demonstrate that "pessimistic dogmatism" is not a specific prediction about the future, but a claim covering all possibilities.

Consider, again, the belief in progress. Essentially it was the conjunction of two ideas: one, man's control over his own fate will increase: two, this increased power will be used benevolently, for good ends (*Ibid*: 2).

These two ideas may be combined in four ways. Dismissing from consideration the combination of benevolence and power insufficient to secure a happy outcome (since he thinks that to be "really our present condition"), he cites three literary works to show the horror of all the other three possibilities.<sup>19</sup>

Gellner's argument, if it is taken seriously (this seems not quite certain), is a remarkable example of "faith" masked as logic. Firstly, he takes the negations of power and benevolence at face value, but rhetorically subverts the positive qualities themselves: for example, the benevolence invoked by Gellner is of that kind which Condorcet claimed for the Directorate, laced with manipulative ruthlessness. Secondly, the argument relies on equating incomplete achievement with utter failure. Thirdly, the argument is too strong: for on Gellner's account, since power and "benevolence" are alike self-defeating, no public good *could ever* have been accomplished, and our present state would be quite as horrific as any of his futures.

Historical pessimism, when it modulates from a critique of historical meliorism into an autonomous position, is no less reductionist than the mentality it opposes. This is unsurprising: but what is important is that nothing less than such an absolute pessimism would

suffice to dismiss historically-oriented hope as "unrealistic".<sup>20</sup>

The second position may be called "anti-optimism", rather than pessimism, because it rejects the notion of "anticipatory consciousness" as such. Thus, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus argues that anticipatory consciousness is merely a psychologically necessary illusion:

Everything that makes man work and get excited utilizes hope. The sole thought that is not mendacious is therefore a sterile thought. In the absurd world the value of a notion or of a life is measured by its sterility (1975: 66).

According to Camus, on the contrary, "The important thing, as Abbé Galiani said to Mme d'Epinau, is not to be cured, but to live with one's ailments". By refusing the recourse to hope, Sisyphus becomes "superior to his fate", "stronger than his rock": the world without a master is now neither sterile nor futile, because the struggle is "enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (*Ibid*: 41, 109, 111). With this conclusion, paradoxically, Camus himself offers his reader a kind of hope, that "happiness" can be found entirely in the quality of one's own obduracy, without regard to the state of the external world.<sup>21</sup>

This sense of the futility of history is sometimes directed specifically at politics. The narrator of Julian Barnes's novel, *Staring at the Sun* writes,

Gregory had little interest in politics. To him the history of his country consisted of a neurotic shuffle between repression and anarchy, and the periods praised for their stability were merely chance instants of balance, points at which both anarchy and repression had their appetites gratified. When the state was being nasty it called itself decisive; when sloppy, it called itself democratic (Barnes, 1986: 168).

Naturally, if "the state" is thus hypostatized, if it is depicted as intrinsically and equally corrupt whatever

its specific structures and procedures, all ethically inspired engagement in the political realm becomes pointless.<sup>22</sup>

### Prometheanism and Sisyphism

The optimistic "future-mindedness" we have so far discussed is entirely immanentist. Of itself, though, theism is naturally no proof against a failure to engage seriously with the negative potential of the future. Perhaps the most plausible Christian reduction of "hope against hope" into optimism stems from the imaginative construct by which God's Kingdom is envisaged as being in continuity with some given set of social circumstances. Accordingly, we noted in Chapter One Leander Keck's insistence that the Kingdom of God "is not the fulfilment of the present but a rectifying alternative to it" (1972: 222). As he explains,

Jesus's career exemplifies the words, "My ways are not your ways". This is why the Kingdom of God is not simply the extension of anyone's present into the future where it is consummated, but is rather the future's claim to restructure everyone's present, including present understandings of God (*Ibid*: 225).

To restructure, however, is not to reverse. If God is truthfully revealed and apprehended in history, this must occur not least through our *present* experiences of goodness, beauty and truth. Any attempt to understand "God's Kingdom" must assume that these experiences are not delusions, that they will be deepened and purified in the Kingdom but will not simply be "rectified". As Keck says, "the effectuation of God's rule means overturning those aspects of the present which defy God's godhood and fulfilling those aspects of the present which affirm it and reflect it in anticipation grounded in trust" (*Ibid*: 221, cf. also Brabant, 1937: 164-88).

It is from a similar perspective that Moltmann offers Prometheus and Sisyphus as respective symbols of two alternative sins against hope, presumption and despair.

Presumption is a premature selfwilled anticipation of the fulfilment of what we hope for from God. Despair is the premature, arbitrary anticipation of the non-fulfilment of what we hope for from God. . . . Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods, stood in contrast to the figure of the obedient servant of God. . . . Sisyphus certainly knows the pilgrim way, and is fully acquainted with struggle and decision and with patient toil, yet without any prospect of fulfilment (Moltmann, 1967: 23, 24).

If Prometheanism is the assumption that transcendent fulfilment is the extrapolation of finite achievement, one might adopt the term Sisyphism to indicate the contrary conviction, that transcendent fulfilment is altogether discontinuous with (and therefore, absent from) history. The term is adopted from Camus. A theist Sisyphist will accept that history has an eschatological *telos*, but only in the restricted sense that the eschaton, by definition, closes history. Transfigured reality postdates history, so to say, but scarcely consummates it; the Kingdom can be awaited but not anticipated. Sisyphism therefore postulates eternity as a separate order of existence to that of history. Like Prometheanism, Sisyphism claims *knowledge* of the transcendent significance of historical events - namely that it is nil!<sup>23</sup>

There is a sense in which Moltmann's account of Prometheanism and Sisyphism begs an important question. To align them with presumption and despair respectively is to characterize them as sinful falsehoods. But it is not self-evidently false to discern in historical events anticipations of the fulfilment promised for the Kingdom; nor it is self-evidently false, on the contrary, to experience history as subject to futility, as an arena in which hopes are inevitably frustrated, so that it is at best the training-ground for individuals' virtue (which

will be rewarded eschatologically).<sup>24</sup> As emphases, Prometheanism and Sisyphism both elucidate human experiences. By the same token neither can claim validity to the exclusion of the other.

### History and Eschatology

How formidable is the problem of relating historical to eschatological hope, may be seen in the work of Paul Tillich and John Macquarrie. In accepting the notion of the future as horizon, both of them presume that the horizon is a transcendent one. As Tillich writes,

In every creative act progress is implied, namely, a step (*gressus*) beyond the given. In this sense the whole movement of history is progressive. It progresses to the particularly new and tries to reach the ultimately new (1968, III: 354).

Macquarrie speaks similarly of a "tacit hopefulness which seems to be diffused through all human existing and acting", and which is the condition of any "investment in the future" (1978: 4). Rather as Tillich speaks of a drive which reaches out both to the "particularly new" and the "ultimately new", Macquarrie affirms *the possibility* of "a full Christian hope - a total hope" which embraces both history and a realm which transcends history (*Ibid*: 106-07). Such formulations, of course, do not themselves clarify the *relationship* between those achievements which are feasible in history and those which must await the eschaton, though it is clear that for Tillich and Macquarrie history cannot be the theatre of any *absolute* fulfilment.

Tillich seems to envisage the relationship between the "particularly new" and the "ultimately new" primarily in terms of discontinuity. The "ultimately new" connotes for him the *summum bonum*. But the "particularly new", since it is defined only as a "step beyond the given", might represent regress and degeneration, taking one away from, not towards, the *telos*.



In the moral realm, he distinguishes between what progress is possible for an individual and what is possible for a culture (1968, III: 354-61). Cultures offer more or less support to the exercise of individual creative freedom, and can contribute to moral education, because "moral education belongs to culture and not to the moral act itself" (*Ibid*: 355): but a moral act is in every case the discrete exercise of an individual's free decision. Tillich therefore argues that a culture's moral "progress" towards "the principle of humanity" (that is, towards "creating the formed personality" and towards social justice) can only be "quantitative", not "qualitative". A culture might progress "in breadth and refinement", for instance, but cannot progress in intrinsic moral status. It follows that, speaking in terms of morality, the "movement of history" cannot contribute to the "ultimately new", even though the unavailing attempt to do so is built into the logic of all human action, into the *gressus* beyond the given.<sup>25</sup>

In using the phrase "total hope", Macquarrie clearly posits a continuity between history and eschatology. But his argument introduces a fundamental problem. Following A. E. Taylor, he allows that any historical gain will entail some corresponding loss; unsought of course, perhaps unforeseeable. If historical gains are to be more than apparent, therefore, one needs criteria by which gains in communal welfare can be weighed against losses. But it is difficult to see where such criteria could be discovered.<sup>26</sup>

An impasse threatens. If historical gains always bring with them correlative losses, then "total hope" is split, since only the transcendent *summum bonum* can be worthy of hope. One cannot resolve the impasse by insisting that historical gains, though never absolute, are at least substantial. For the very question at issue

is whether they count for anything at all, whether they are only incomplete (which we should expect) or are systematically self-cancelling. If the latter were the truth, then even though anticipations of the Kingdom might still be glimpsed within history, they would have no worth other than as pointers to a future state that would, when effectuated, abrogate history. Sisyphism would be the only position compatible with a Christian eschatology.

After drawing on the work of Tillich and Macquarrie to set out the problematic of the relationship of history to eschatology, we now return to Voegelin's discussion of St. Paul. He finds the Pauline writings to be dominated by "the assurance of immortalizing transfiguration through the vision of the Resurrected". This "vision of the Resurrected" "assured Paul that the transfiguration of reality had actually begun and would soon be completed by the Second Coming" (OH IV: 256, 268). The Pauline assurance is subject to a potential distortion, namely the assumption that one has discerned not merely meaning *in* history, but the meaning *of* history. Such an assumption, in turn, might well lead one

to abolish the tension between the eschatological *telos* of reality and the mystery of the transfiguration that is actually going on within historical reality. The Pauline myth . . . . validly expresses the *telos* of the movement that is experienced in reality, but it becomes invalid when it is used to anticipate the concrete process of transfiguration within history (*Ibid*: 270, cf. also, 248-49).

Now it would be wrong, on the basis of this text, to interpret Voegelin as denying to eschatology any historical reference. In fact, one critic does make such a charge, namely that Voegelin virtually prescind from the Christian notion that "God is actively present in the world transforming it in anticipation of the consummation of His Kingdom" (Douglass, 1978: 149). But as Voegelin writes elsewhere, "With the appearance of Jesus, God

himself entered into the eternal present of history. The Kingdom of God was now within history, though not of it" (OH I: 345). Of course, the eschatological present, no less than the future, remains a mystery. It cannot be confidently recognized, still less be associated with one's own civilizational action. Thus in a letter of 1953 to Alfred Schutz, he wrote that eschatology

is understood by all important Christian thinkers as a symbolism, as an eternal presence of the Judgment. Yet remarks constantly recur indicating that the end of the world and the transfiguration of creation are taken to be sense-perceived real phenomena (Opitz & Sebba, 1981: 456).

History, then, acquires a meaning under the shadow of an end, and the end itself reaches into history. But the presence of the end cannot be identified as one phenomenon among others. One can say only that "the history of mankind . . . extends unknowably into an indefinite future" (OH II: 2).

Now as long as one moves, like Paul, in "an open field of theophany" (*Ibid*: 259), the experience of eschatological process complements rather than contradicts the awareness (so fundamental to Plato) of the structure of metaxic existence. As we have seen, however, Voegelin argues that Paul's very advance beyond Plato becomes, when torn out of its experiential context, the catalyst for new noetic deformations, as consciousness of the movement towards the beyond threatens to become an "obsessive illumination", blinding one to "the contextual structure of reality" (*Ibid*: 20; OH IV: 20).<sup>27</sup>

Voegelin elsewhere (SPG: 88-92) offers a concise account of the structure of such noetic deformations. He distinguishes two components in "the Christian idea of perfection": the teleological component in which, through "sanctification of life", one can move towards the goal of perfection (so participating in the goal, at least by

one's being attracted to it); and the axiological component, the *telos* of perfection itself, the state of highest value. So, for example, "progressivism", by which it is imagined that society can smoothly approach some ideal state of the thinker's own choice, immanentizes the teleological component: and any articulation of a fully achieved social "ideal state" (or of a fully achieved negation of societal evil), immanentizes the axiological component: a third deformation, which Voegelin calls "activist mysticism" is the type of speculative construction which both describes the ideal society and prescribes the means to bring it about.

Thus, in Voegelin's view, the French thinkers referred to earlier in this chapter immanentize the Christian teleology:<sup>28</sup> Thomas More's *Utopia* (to which I shall refer in Chapter Ten) immanentizes the axiological component: and the "activist mystics" Voegelin has in mind are Comte and Marx (whose case will be considered in Chapter Nine) (SPG 88-92). The political theology we are considering would probably be classed by Voegelin as activist mysticism, since it unites "future-mindedness" with a concern for praxis.

From his reading of St. Paul, therefore, Voegelin concludes that one cannot specify which facets of history are genuine anticipations of transfigured reality: for their identification must always be subject to the metaxic tension between ignorance and knowledge.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, since the eschaton is present in history, history must contain anticipations of transfigured reality, even though they cannot be securely identified from one's own perspective within history. It is at this point that Voegelin's central concept of the metaxy illuminates our theoretical problem about the status of history. For whereas the Sisyphist holds that historical anticipations have value *only* as signs of the transcendent consummation, for Voegelin the anticipations

themselves are subject to the tension between fulfilment and non-fulfilment: they participate in the transcendent reality they point to.

#### Voegelin's Restricted Conception of Hope

According to Voegelin's discussion of Pauline thought, therefore, fulfilment as well as non-fulfilment is experienced within history. Therefore, even though one can never predict the future occurrences which would vindicate one's present hopes, it is reasonable to believe that the historical future will *somehow* validate them, though never without qualification. In this way, the impasse we have identified is resolved: since the eschaton reaches into the present there is no event or act which is "merely" historical, or which is open to exclusively "quantitative" assessment.

This position offers ample ground for a historically based hope that is quite distinct from vulgar optimism.<sup>30</sup> But Voegelin does not choose to develop this insight. More unfortunately, certain of his emphases undermine it. I shall identify two such instances briefly, and consider a third more fully. Firstly, we have just cited his recognition that eschatological thought symbolizes the "eternal presence of the Judgment" within history. But this is a partial formulation: for if the eschaton reaches into history, the "whole eschaton", so to speak, must reach into the whole of history.<sup>31</sup> The eschaton must, therefore, be present not only as judgment but also as blessing and fulfilment, not least in human capacities and actions. In fact, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, Voegelin recognizes that the event of transfiguration "hangs as a threat or hope over every present" (QH IV: 239).

It is significant that he metaphorically locates eschatological judgment "within" history, but eschato-

logical transfiguration "over" it. We may look to Moltmann for a corrective:

History and eschatology cannot be metaphysically divided, as this world and the next, in the world and out of the world. Nor can the two merely be brought to paradoxical identity in the single point of the eschatological moment. Through his mission and his resurrection Jesus has brought the kingdom of God into history. As the eschatological future the kingdom has become the power that determines the present (1977: 192).

Voegelin never stresses this truth, though it is implicit in the Pauline experience of theophany on which he meditates that the divine blessing possesses historical efficacy. What is more, if Moltmann's statement is correct, it is also reversible and one must say, with Rahner, that our history is definitive in the presence of God (1975: 89).

A second instance pertains to Voegelin's critique, considered above, of the ideology of progress. Thus, he sums up the thought of d'Alembert as follows:

the deceptive picture of a progressive civilization arose in which the advancement of science seemed to compensate amply for the atrophy of other civilizational values (ER: 79).

There is no need to dissent from this summary. But Voegelin makes his critique from a position which itself embodies a dubious myth of decline. Thus, over against Turgot's detection of a general advance of the *masse totale*, a "softening of mores", Voegelin identifies an overall decline in sensibility through the same modern epoch. In Machiavelli's tension between *virtù* and *fortuna*, for instance, there remains alive a sense of tragedy, "the Polybian shudder in the face of history" (for an explanation of the phrase, cf. OH IV: 131-32). Such awareness has given way "first to the hypocritical optimism of competitive society which ignored the victims of progress, and later to the frank brutality of the collective era which acknowledged with a shrug that

shavings will fly when planing is going on" (Voegelin, 1951a: 158). Voegelin would endorse Berdyaev's moral condemnation of any optimism which regards the sufferings of one generation primarily as means to some future consummation: such a future would "devour its past" (1936: 187, 190).<sup>32</sup> Though the compassion inherent in this position does him credit, it also leads him to the kind of generalization (e.g. "the frank brutality of the collective era") which he would criticize ruthlessly in other thinkers.

He stresses that Plato's account of the progressive disintegration of the good society is told as a story, and is not meant as a history of decline (OH III: 117). But elsewhere, in discussing Hesiod's fable of "The Ages of the World", he claims that the notion that the successive ages are getting worse "has its independent source in the *experience* of decline in the course of history" (OH II: 150, emphasis added): or again, that

The symbolism of better, preceding ages, and in particular the happy innocence of the Golden Age, originates in the experience of historical deterioration of society (*Ibid*: 156).<sup>33</sup>

Now, it has been noted throughout this study that "experience" is for Voegelin a weighty term. But a process of historical deterioration which covers a succession of generations, can hardly be *experienced*. A sense of decline has no higher epistemological status than a sense of progress, and is symmetrical to it. Both decline and progress are second-order interpretations of experience rather than experiences themselves, and each requires one to select for attention certain particular phenomena from the entire social flux. Yet Voegelin characterizes decline as an "experience" and progress as a "deceptive picture".

The third instance of Voegelin's restriction of the range of hope is especially important. It concerns his

account of the potentialities of "human nature" itself. As we saw in Chapter Two, his claim that "the nature of man is constant" (QH I: 60) by no means posits a rigid framework of human characteristics and possibilities, but means that every human being has the same constitutive experience of metaxic participation (both active and receptive, by creation as well as by response) in a fuller reality (cf. also An-E: 71-88, 172). For him, therefore, it is tautologous to assert that human nature cannot change within history.<sup>34</sup>

But in the transcript of what reads as a somewhat acrimonious conversation with the Marxist theorist Lucien Goldmann, Voegelin, invoking the Thomist distinction between the transcendent and immanent domains of being, locates "l'idée chrétienne de vie parfaite" in the *visio beatifica*, and condemns the "régression" by which this telos of human life (namely, "une humanité réellement nouvelle") is sought within historical existence (1961a: 136). Voegelin therefore implies that human beings, though unchanging, can perversely seek to change.

At this point we must identify our precise criticism of Voegelin. To dissent from him, clearly, does not commit one to endorsing Goldmann's own scepticism about transcendence. Rather, our criticism concerns the dissimilar capacity for "development" which Voegelin attributes (whether to individuals and to groups), according as they are considered as embodiments of the *zoon noetikon* or of the *zoon politikon*.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, he expresses a robust hope in the possibility of a renewal of noetic life. He finds it, naturally, in individuals: notably in such "spiritually energetic people" as Orwell, Camus and Thomas Mann, who proved able to break out from their respective ideological environments (AM: 98-99), but also in the students who were



helped by such thinkers to an intellectual catharsis (An-E: 171-72). And, with somewhat more ambivalence, he suggests that the present time is propitious for this renewal to be socially efficacious (Cony: 16-20). There remains the problem, he admits, that even the most cogent critics of ideology might be at a loss as to what *positive* positions are tenable, as well as the different problem of the power still exerted (for example, in governments and academic institutions) by the ideologists. Nevertheless, he argues that the major ideologies (of indefinite progress, of "Hegelian historicism", of psychoanalysis) are "exhausted", having each been criticized so effectively and so fundamentally as to lose all claim to respect.<sup>36</sup>

But the possibility of this renewal is confined to the *zoon noetikon*: in the process of history,

man's nature does no more than become luminous for its eschatological destiny. The process of its becoming luminous, however, though it adds to the understanding of human nature and its problems, does not transmute human nature in the here and now of spatio-temporal existence (AM: 126).

Such an advance constitutes an experience of the teleological component of perfection in the realm of noesis.

However, Voegelin does not envisage any analogous political advance. In *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, though allowing that we all have good cause to be dissatisfied with our situation in the world, he attacked the "gnostic" belief that,

the order of being will have to be changed in an historical process. From a wretched world a good one must evolve historically. This assumption is not altogether self-evident, because the Christian solution might also be considered - namely that the world throughout history will remain as it is and that man's salvational fulfilment is brought about through grace in death. . . . Since, therefore, there is no fulfilment in this world, Christian life on earth takes its special form from the life to come in the next (SPG: 87, 88).

One would have expected him simply to suggest that one of the metaxic tensions is that between fulfilment and non-fulfilment. In that case the *zoon politikon* would rightly be equivalent to the *zoon noetikon*. In both realms, one can experience advance: but, within the metaxy, one can experience perfection teleologically, but not axiologically. But he here implies that "fulfilment" is a state, present or absent in its entirety - and therefore, as far as history is concerned - absent. He never retracted this point, though in his later writings he refrained from making it.

Political action, then, is for Voegelin at best a matter of secondary importance, because it cannot accomplish any result in a given social matrix analogous to the *periagoge* of the individual: namely, a significant shift to the pole of truth over untruth, justice over exploitation, love over collective self-seeking. At worst, it compounds human misery by systematically distracting one from the only proper response, the noetic search for enlightenment. Similarly, he thinks that any seeming experience of political or historical fulfilment cannot be a genuine though partial anticipation of the Kingdom. It must be an illusion. Simultaneously, he supplies what he regards as the "Christian solution", defining Christian life not by the present following of Jesus (empowered by a grace given within one's concrete life), but by a salvation which can be received only by "grace in death". Such a split surely betrays Voegelin's account of a "human nature" which is unified, at once noetic, political and historical.<sup>37</sup>

The implications for politics, considered as the form of life in which continuous societal flux is made the matter of individual or communal deliberation, are plain. To speak of "deliberation" signifies that reflection is oriented towards appropriate action. And "civilizational action" (which category must logically

include "political action") is a concept which Voegelin deeply distrusts, as we saw in Chapter Two when discussing Pascal:

Gnostic speculation overcame the uncertainty of faith by receding from transcendence and endowing man and his intramundane range of action with the meaning of eschatological fulfilment. In the measure in which this immanentization progressed experientially, civilizational activity became a mystical work of self-salvation. The spiritual strength of the soul which in Christianity was devoted to the sanctification of life could now be diverted into the more appealing, more tangible, and, above all, so much easier creation of the terrestrial paradise. Civilizational action became a *divertissement*, in the sense of Pascal, but a *divertissement* which demonically absorbed into itself the eternal destiny of man and substituted for the life of the spirit (NSP: 129).

Our criticism of this lurid passage will sum up our discussion of the third instance of Voegelin's restriction of the proper content of Christian hope. Speaking axiologically, the noetic sanctification of life is quite as unattainable within history as is the transformation of society. Speaking teleologically, since the eschaton reaches into the present it follows that "intramundane action" can indeed, have "the meaning of eschatological fulfilment". Therefore, it is possible (though not, of course, certain) that civilizational action might be undertaken with no expectation that it will achieve either "self-salvation" or a "terrestrial paradise". In that case, civilizational action can be *graced* action, an expression of the sanctification of life, rather than a *divertissement* from it. As Reinhold Niebuhr writes,

The struggle for justice is as profound a revelation of the possibilities and limits of historical existence as the quest for truth. In some respects it is even more revealing because it engages all human vitalities and powers more obviously than the intellectual quest (1943: 253).

In representing civilizational action as intrinsically a *divertissement* Voegelin gives plausibility (at least in this instance) to Fierro's observation that eschatology tends to serve as an ideological escape from political responsibility. The logic of Voegelin's position renders one's life eschatologically resonant in its noetic and its individual-ethical aspects, but not in its political aspect. This dichotomy restricts the impact of what he himself acknowledges to be the genuine Christian differentiation by which *agape* takes priority over *noesis*, and also banishes the concept of hope from the world of politics.<sup>38</sup>

Conclusion: an Adequate Conception of Hope

In a characteristic essay (No. 69 of *The Adventurer*), Samuel Johnson writes of hope as "a pleasure borrowed from futurity". True, those who recollect their past hopes will probably confess their subsequent disappointments. Nevertheless, "Of every great and complicated event, part depends upon causes out of our power, and part must be effected by vigour and perseverance". Johnson concludes that our hopes "like all other cordials, though they may invigorate in a small quantity, intoxicate in a greater" (Johnson 1963: 389-95).

To classify hope as a "virtue", however, is to claim that it is not merely a matter of personal disposition or temperament, and not merely a psychological fiction necessary to one's survival, but that it is an authentic response to the structure of reality.<sup>39</sup>

If hope is, indeed, a virtue, then any false restriction of its range is an impediment to virtue. Political theology, by its terms of reference, must direct its hope indivisibly (but not indistinguishably) to the eschatological Kingdom itself and to its anticipations within history: in other words it must accept the challenge of

living from Macquarrie's "total hope". Thus, for example, Rosemary Ruether, discussing the clause in the Matthaean version of the Lord's Prayer, that God's will be done on earth as in heaven, writes: "Heaven, here, stands as the mandate for what must be done on earth, not as a place of flight beyond the earth to an 'other place' beyond earthly potentials" (1972: 235).<sup>40</sup> It follows that the legitimate critique of historical optimism must not be allowed to engender a scepticism about the future, which could only disable those who are disabled enough already.

Nevertheless, the poignant problematic set out in Chapter One is not yet dispelled. For if Voegelin's critique of "progressivism" has demonstrated the implausibility of a belief in historical meliorism, then might it not be the case that any hope oriented towards history is doomed to be systematically frustrated, betrayed in one manner even as it is validated in another?

In the final chapter of her book on the "Western experience of messianic hope", Ruether offers a partial but insufficient answer (1970: 283-88). She suggests that the language of radical social change is better regarded as a "salvation drama" than as an appraisal of what social change is actually practicable. Movements of "revolutionary elan" are likely either to provoke successful (and brutal) counter-action, or subsequently to be co-opted by "carrier forces" which corrupt their energies.<sup>41</sup>

If this caution sounds Voegelinian, her affirmative remarks are less so, and also less persuasive. Without the radical vision, she argues, even modest social gains would be unlikely, for *any* challenge to a dominant and apparently unchangeable social order requires a visionary impetus and an intensity of commitment that pragmatists

cannot encompass. Human beings need more than realism: "within the bounds of present life, the struggle itself is its own reward" (*Ibid*: 288).

There are two objections to these twin propositions. Firstly, once one assesses "revolutionary elan" in consequentialist terms, as she does, then the admittedly modest gains she identifies seem to count for much less than the suffering likely to attend them. One recalls Berdyaev's concept of the future that "devours its past". Secondly, to say that the struggle is its own reward is to settle for a benefit that is entirely interior to the psyche of the revolutionary.

For a more adequate position, we may return to Voegelin's insistence that history has a direction, that it moves towards the "threat or hope" of a consummation. He draws on the fifth chapter of Paul's letter to the *Romans* to assert that the foundations of hope are endurance (*hypomone*) and "character-forming perseverance" (*dokime*) (*QH IV*: 239-41). To invoke such qualities is sufficient to guard against the two ersatz forms of hope: on the one hand, historical meliorism; on the other, a crude, externally directed longing that some congenial set of circumstances will occur, or some happy event befall us, of which disposition Rahner correctly observes that one "wishes not to hope but to enjoy now what is hoped for" (1975: 92).

Discussion of Camus led us to the conclusion that the capacity to endure and persevere does not *of itself* fulfil our hopes. External and internal indices of fulfilment must somehow be integrated. That this is possible, however, is the weighty conclusion of the very Pauline argument to which Voegelin appeals. Voegelin remarks on the "scurrility" of critical attempts to explain away Paul's theophanic faith-experience. But it is a part of that faith-experience that "Where sin

increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (*Romans* 5: 20-21, R.S.V. trans.). These verses, when taken together with Voegelin's own insistence that the direction of the cosmos is towards salvation, that "reality" is moving towards "eminent reality", imply that hope deserves to be given the primacy over threat. Therefore, Voegelin is false to his own insight when he either accords parity of emphasis to threat and to hope, or speaks of the presence within history of eschatological judgment, without also stressing the presence of eschatological empowerment.

One thinker who drew out these twofold implications of Paul's argument more fully than Voegelin was Teilhard de Chardin:

Because we love, and in order to love more, we find ourselves happily reduced to sharing . . . in all the struggles, all the anxieties, all the aspirations, and also all the affections, of the earth *in so far as all these contain within them a principle of ascension and synthesis* ("*Pensées*", 1970: 88, author's emphasis).

For if reality moves towards eminent reality, this is a task as well as a fact. The directional movement is not to be distorted into the "pitiful millenarianisms" of "an era of abundance and euphoria - a Golden Age": "it is but right that our hearts should sink at the thought of so 'bourgeois' an ideal". On the contrary, we must cultivate not *well-being*, but "a taste for *greater being*" (*Ibid*: 99, 100, author's emphasis).<sup>42</sup>

Dr. Johnson implied that future reality is in part, though unknowably, the result of present human effort: by the same token, contrary to Camus, hope is not mendacious, though a lack of hope can be self-fulfilling. And whereas meliorism *assumes* an objectively progressive trend in history, the position for which we here argue

unites a faith-stance with a moral commitment; it is marked by a refusal to split one's trust in future good from one's fidelity in the present. As Buber writes,

For eschatology the decisive act happens from above, even when . . . . it gives man a significant and active share in the coming redemption; for Utopia everything is subordinated to conscious human will . . . . But they are neither of them mere cloud castles: if they seek to stimulate or intensify in the reader or listener his critical relationship to the present, they also seek to show him perfection - in the light of the Absolute, but at the same time as something towards which an active path leads from the present (1958: 8).

Such a formulation unites a critical power equal to Voegelin's with a more profound hope than Voegelin ever articulates. It is not only the case that the divine *avenir* must, in history, always be subject to the "aporias of realization": conversely the utopian *futur* is capable of being caught up into the divine *avenir*.



## CHAPTER NINE

## RESPONSIBLE POLITICS: VOEGELIN'S CRITIQUE OF IDEOLOGIES

The Case of Marx and Marxism'

In a characteristic reminiscence Voegelin tells in his *Autobiographical Memoir* how, stimulated by the recent Russian Revolution, he read Marx's *Capital* in the vacation before beginning his university studies:

Being a complete innocent in such matters I was of course convinced by what I read, and I must say that from August 1919 to about December of that year I was a Marxist. By Christmas the matter had worn off, because . . . I had attended courses in both economic theory and the history of economic theory and knew what was wrong with Marx (AM: 9-10).

One cannot help but sense Voegelin's disdain for those who are less quickly disenchanting.

Voegelin's fundamental objection to Marx is one he scarcely troubles to argue explicitly, since it is so clearly implicit in his own philosophy: if consciousness is prior to political structures, then "historical materialism" is disallowed. He came to this position very early, as soon as he had followed his courses in economics by reading Max Weber's writings on Marxism, which date from 1904-05 (AM: 11).<sup>2</sup>

Voegelin's criticisms tend to focus on four aspects of Marx's thought, which in different ways transgress the metaxic principle: (1) his "Promethean" conviction that humanity can mould its own destiny; (2) his banishing from socialist discourse of all philosophical questioning, in particular about transcendent reality; (3) his eschatology, according to which the "realm of freedom" is

free from tragedy and constraint, but also historically immanent; (4) the abdication from ethical responsibility within the "realm of necessity" (specifically in the course of the revolutionary struggle), because of which Marx, regardless of his own intentions, is the true parent of "Marxist-Leninism".

But we must first note the ground which Voegelin shares with Marx. Voegelin criticizes the apologists of progress for reducing history to some preferred single strand of historical meaning. Similarly, Marx, though he acknowledges the fact of progress, will not subscribe to any ideology of progress (such as the advance of the *masse totale*) which obscures the truth that its benefits and costs are unequally distributed. What underlies that inequality might be as important a line of meaning in history as is progress itself. He writes in the Preface to *Capital*, we "suffer not only from the development of capitalist production, but also from the incompleteness of that development". (Marx, 1977: 416; cf. ER: 243).<sup>3</sup>

Voegelin also endorses, at least in part, Marx's central accusation against capitalism, one already fully articulated in the "Paris Manuscripts", and one against which capitalism has scarcely troubled to defend itself: that it dehumanizes. Because "labour" is simply a factor of production, like land and capital, workers are reduced to "labour power", and the more they put into their products (which belong to others) the less humanity they retain. Conversely, owners are alienated by becoming a mere expression of the power of money (*Ibid*: 77-87, 109-11). As Voegelin writes,

Marx has laid his finger on the sore spot of modern industrial society . . . that is the growth of economic institutions into a power of such overwhelming influence on the life of every single man, that in the face of such power all talk about human freedom becomes futile. . . . Marx is the only thinker of stature in the nineteenth century (and none has followed him) who attempted a philosophy of

human labour as well as a critical analysis of the institutions of industrial society (ER: 299-300).<sup>4</sup>

By acknowledging the force of this critique, Voegelin distances himself from that kind of anti-Marxism which merely serves as an apologia for capitalism. But though he partially accepts Marx's critique, Voegelin is much more concerned with Marx's own philosophy and its persistent influence. In this respect, his verdict is damning. In order to secure its success, Marx's idea

not only had to rest on a substantially sound analysis of the actual state of Western society; it also had to be a part of the crisis itself. Only because the idea was the manifestation of a profound spiritual disease, only because it carried the disease to a new extreme, could it fascinate the masses of a diseased society. (ER: 255).

#### *Marx's Prometheanism*

Using a phrase he takes from Pascal (cf. *Pensées* 696 & 698; Pascal, 1961: 243-44), Voegelin frequently writes of certain thinkers' *libido dominandi*. As he explains in an unpublished essay, "Nietzsche and Pascal" (Hooq), Pascal coined this phrase by modifying the Vulgate translation of the *First Letter of John* 2:16: "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world" (R.S.V.). Where the Vulgate has *concupiscentia carnis, concupiscentia oculorum, and superbia vitae*, Pascal substitutes *libido sentiendi, libido sciendi, and libido dominandi*. On the basis of his own semantic parallelism, Pascal constructs a character typology consisting of those who sin principally in the flesh (through appetite), in the intellect (through curiosity), and in the will (through pride).

Voegelin finds the *libido dominandi* to be the root of Marx's errors (cf. e.g. SPG: 44-49). Explaining his position in a letter of 1953 to Alfred Schutz (Opitz &

Sebba, 1981: 449-57), Voegelin argues that Marx refused the *sacrificium intellectus*. This sacrifice is not, as nineteenth century liberals thought, "an abdication of reason through the acceptance of dogma". It is required by reason itself, for it simply recognizes "the obligation not to operate with the human intellect in regions inaccessible to it, i.e. in the regions of faith".

If we assume, as Marx for one did, that man can somehow be transformed into a superman free of passions and therefore no longer in need of the means of institutional pressure that keep him on the right path, we have thrown out the classical as well as the Jewish and the Christian insight into the essence of human nature as opposed to divine nature (Opitz & Sebba, 451-52).

Marx, however, "proposed speculative intellectual theses that can be proposed only when the abyss separating the divine from the human has not been experienced" (*Ibid*: 452). His "Prometheanism" is a failure in "attunement".

Now inasmuch as religious faith embodies the awareness of human insufficiency, it is true that its perspective on existence systematically excludes the Promethean perspective as a reductionism (cf. Kolakowski, 1982: 199-204, 214-15). But from the Promethean perspective, religious faith must, in turn, inevitably appear as a "mystification". Voegelin's attack on Marx, therefore, seems to express his own perspective without thereby demonstrating its correctness. In this way, ascribing the *sin of libido dominandi* to Marx begs the question.

To support his claim, Voegelin cites the eleventh of the *Theses on Feuerbach*: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" (Marx, 1977: 158). Naturally, Voegelin is not making the facile charge that Marx is anti-intellectual. Marx knows very well that one can never escape from interpreting the world, and therefore had better do it consciously and honestly. He also knows that philosophers cannot do alone what (he thinks) is

possible for the human species as a whole, "change the world". But the thesis makes two other claims, which Voegelin does contest.

Firstly, the *point* of even philosophers' work is not interpretation itself, but the change it serves. The "rule of thought" thus gives way to "materialism", in line with the claim Marx makes in *The German Ideology*:

In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. . . . Where speculation ends - in real life - there real positive science begins: the representation of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men (Marx, 1977: 164-65).

The service of human "development", ("practical" development and not merely, for example, the deliverance from religious illusion which Feuerbach claimed to achieve) is in Marx's view the overriding obligation of everyone, including philosophers.

Secondly, the thesis claims that the world can, indeed, be changed, that one cannot appeal to certain "abstract" laws of nature which set bounds to what is changeable (cf. Levy, 1981: 78-79).

In response, Voegelin writes that it would be senseless to depreciate the philosopher's *bios theoretike* by pointing to the need for action, "for nobody maintains that contemplation is a substitute for practice, or vice versa" (ER: 277). This claim is odd, because that is exactly what Marx insists, not only in the eleventh but also in the eighth of the *Theses*:

All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice" (Marx, 1977: 157).

Marx approves of interpretation and analysis, but only in so far as they belong to practice. He *would* depreciate the contemplative *bios theoretike*, as it is understood by

Plato and Aristotle; namely, as the *goal* to which action tends, and as something which lies "beyond the fulfilment of one's existence as citizen" (An-E: 207). If Voegelin does miss the point here, however, it merely relieves him from the need to launch an additional attack on Marx, as he certainly would, in defence of the *bios theoretike*: and once acquainted with Voegelin's position, the reader can take such a disagreement for granted.

More importantly, Voegelin argues against Marx that "one cannot 'change the world' as one can 'interpret the world'; one can only act *within* the world" (ER: 277). One might reply that the "practical process of development" which *The German Ideology* commends refers to a continuous process and not an absolute change. But this reply would fail to meet Voegelin's case, for two reasons. Firstly, as we shall see in discussing Marx's eschatology, Marx is interested not in the process of development as such, but in the qualitative change in which all development is to culminate: in this respect I shall suggest that Voegelin's attack is justified. But secondly, Voegelin argues that, in order to sustain the idea that "changing the world" is even conceivable, Marx has to carry out an intellectual "swindle". This contention leads us to our next section.

#### *Marx's Prohibition of Questions: the "Swindle"*

In the third of the "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" (1977: 94-95), Marx argues as follows:

A being only counts itself as independent when it stands on its own feet and it stands on its own feet as long as it owes its existence to itself.

As Marx admits, it is very hard to "drive out of the minds of people" their sense that they owe life to a source beyond themselves: "They find it impossible to conceive of nature and man existing through themselves since it contradicts all the evidences of social life".

It also seems natural, Marx agrees, to extend the series backwards and ask who created the *first* human being. However, one must distinguish what everyone sees, that every individual life is engendered by a "human species-act" of the parents, from the question "Who created the first man and the world as a whole?". This further question is illegitimate, because "When you inquire about the creation of the world and man, then you abstract from man and the world." In other words, one must make the counterfactual supposition that the cosmos and the human species are non-existent in order to conceive of their then being created. Decline to make that supposition, and one has no standpoint from which to ask the question: or, as Marx says, "give up your abstraction and you will give up your question". In contrast, Marx asserts,

since for socialist man what is called world history is nothing but the creation of man by human labour and the development of nature for man, he has the observable and irrefutable proof of his self-creation and the process of his origin (1977: 95).

This is a bad argument. Even if one allowed history to be entirely the product of human actions, that is not "irrefutable proof" of humanity's *original* self-creation. Marx does nothing to show that the "socialist" stance is other than arbitrary.

But the closing section of Voegelin's critique of this argument (SPG: 24-26) is equally unsatisfactory.

If the questioner were consistent, says Marx, he would have to think of himself as not existing - even while, in the very act of questioning, he *is*. . . . The "individual man", however, is not obliged to be taken in by Marx's syllogism and think of himself as not existing because he does not exist of himself. Indeed, Marx concedes this very point - without, however, choosing to go into it. Instead he breaks off the debate by declaring that "for socialist man" - that is, for the man who has accepted Marx's construct of the process of being and history - such a question "becomes a practical impossibility". . . . When "socialist man" speaks, man has to be silent (SPG: 25-26).

This argument neglects the fact that Marx distinguishes between two different types of question. We all experience that we do not individually exist of ourselves. No one has an analogous *experience* that the entire human species owes its existence to some power outside itself. As Voegelin has remarked (SPG: 24) the question of infinite regress led in Ionian philosophy to the assertion of the arche: Marx, he argues, knew this, but simply dismissed it as an "abstraction". But Voegelin does not show *why* Marx should feel obliged to take issue with the Ionians. It is clear that the origin (arche) of the entire species must be an entirely different kind of event than the reproduction of any individual person: otherwise the Creator would simply be the first parent. Marx is consistent in denying that the first kind of experience, universally shared though it is, justifies asking the second, empirically unanswerable, question.

Nevertheless Voegelin considers (SPG: 27-28) that his argument has shown Marx to be "an intellectual swindler" who knows that his entire untenable intellectual construct will collapse as soon as basic philosophical questions are asked (such as that of the aetiology of the race), and who, even so, does not abandon his construct but prohibits the questions.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, though, Marx's refusal to ask aetiological questions is an essential component of his theoretical position. As Kolakowski interprets Marx, "A man cannot consider the world as though he were outside it, or isolate a purely cognitive act from the totality of human behaviour, since the cognizing subject is an aspect of the integral subject which is an active participant in nature" (1978: 137; cf. also 175-76). For Marx, in Levy's neat formulation, "ontology is swallowed up in history and epistemology in a critical sociology of knowledge" (1981: 72).



I agree that this position is inadequate. One does not become a disembodied consciousness simply by asking non-empirical questions about the origins of humanity, any more than by making non-empirical assertions about its future, as Marx does so freely (e.g. Marx, 1977: 168-71). Further, the question of Creation is not an abstractly epistemological question, but emerges from an experience of one's *present*, not merely one's original or genetic, dependency. Marx begs the question at issue; for the illusory nature of such a transcendent experience must properly be his conclusion, not his premiss. Again, one might observe that responses to the question of human origins are capable of affecting one's practical life. But, of course, Marx did not believe that it was his business to argue the case for philosophical atheism, as did Feuerbach. Even if his theory is deficient, it is not *ipso facto* dishonest.

Voegelin also accuses Marx of swindling in a second instance. In his doctoral dissertation of 1840-41, the young Marx makes his own the bitter cry of Prometheus in Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*: "In a word, I hate all the gods". This cry is directed at Hermes, the messenger of the gods, who replies, "It appears you have been stricken with no small madness". According to Voegelin, Marx *suppresses* Hermes's speech in order to imply that the "confession" of Prometheus epitomizes the meaning of the tragedy. Voegelin thinks "that Aeschylus wished to represent hatred of the gods as madness" (SPG: 35-37, and the unpublished essay of 1977 "Deformations of Faith"):

In the distortion of the intended meaning into its opposite the suppression of questions can be seen again on all its levels: the deception of the reader by isolating the text, . . . the awareness of the swindle (for we assume that Marx had read the tragedy), and the demonic persistence in the revolt against better judgment (SPG: 37).

If Marx's argument here is, indeed, a swindle, so is Voegelin's, for it is structured in exactly the same way.

Whereas, according to Voegelin, Marx takes Prometheus's revolt to sum up "the meaning of the tragedy", Voegelin himself takes Hermes's rebuke as doing so - without in any way trying to demonstrate why Hermes is more trustworthy than Prometheus; or, indeed, why "Aeschylus" should be taken as supporting *either* character, since the dramatist might well be interested in dramatically articulating the conflict itself, rather than endorsing either party to it. As the gods are by no means without fault in this play, it is arbitrary to *assume* that Hermes is the spokesman for spiritual order. Indeed, if one seeks internal evidence to weigh the respective reliability of the disputants, one finds that the divine Hephaestus laments Prometheus's fate and is reluctant to obey Zeus and forge Prometheus's fetters (Aeschylus, 1922: 221, 215-16), and that the verdicts of the human Chorus are ambivalent. They say (in Smyth's mannered translation), "Thou hast no fear of Zeus, Prometheus, but in self-will dost reverence mortals overmuch": but they also say, "Zeus, holding direful sway by self-appointed laws, displayeth towards the gods of eld an overweening spirit" (*Ibid*; 263, 253).

In asserting that Marx is a swindler, Voegelin allows that "this is certainly not the last word on Marx. . . . But it must unrelentingly be the first word if we do not want to obstruct our understanding of the prohibition of questions" (SPG; 28). If our argument is correct, Voegelin could scarcely complain if his accusation against Marx were applied to himself. As a competent philosopher he constructs a blatantly leaky argument; and as a skilled reader he suddenly becomes naive, attributing (without supporting argument) the utterances of a character to the dramatist himself.

Of course, by suggesting that Marx is not the swindler that Voegelin thinks him to be, we are likewise free to exonerate Voegelin. But Voegelin goes on to explain

Marx's aberration in terms of the will to power, the *libido dominandi* (*Ibid*: 28-34). This explanation, I suggest, does have to be turned back on Voegelin. At the very point at which he thinks himself to have exposed Marx's bad faith, Voegelin is arguing as a polemicist (a philodoxer), rather than as a philosopher. This is the *libido dominandi* under another guise.<sup>6</sup>

In case my conclusion seems harsh, I shall shortly give one further example of Voegelin's conduct of this debate, concerning Marx's Address of 1850 to the Communist League. However, I have suggested that Voegelin is correct to identify in Marx "a fear of critical concepts and of philosophy in general" (ER: 259), even if he is mistaken in diagnosing the cause of that fear. And Marx's prohibition of critical questioning to "socialist man" proved highly significant for the subsequent history of Marxist states:

When the Marxian idea becomes a public creed, obviously such dilettantism and downright stupidity can be protected against ridicule only by a radical prohibition of philosophy. . . . We cannot exclude it as a possibility that a society in which Marxism is enforced as the official creed will commit suicide through intellectual dishonesty (ER: 301).

This speculation of the 1940s looks prescient from the vantage point of 1990. However, since Voegelin holds that *any* public creed tends to betray its engendering experiences by ossifying them, it remains an open question how far Marx is to be blamed for the crimes committed by the mass movements which have laid claim to his heritage.<sup>7</sup>

### *Marx's Eschatological Consciousness*

In order to end human alienation, in Marx's view, capitalism must be superseded. But in the "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" he distinguishes between two modes of the necessary overthrow, "crude communism" and

"true communism" (ER: 290-91). In its original form, universal communism is "only a generalization and completion of private property", by which "the category of worker is not abolished but extended to all" (Marx, 1977: 87-89). The domination of property likewise persists, though expressed in a different mode, and, as before, all are degraded by its spirit: "envious desire is precisely the essence of competition. Crude communism is only the completion of this envy" (Ibid: 88).

But crude communism is only "the first positive abolition of private property". True communism is claimed to be no less than "the genuine solution of the antagonism between man and nature and between man and man. . . . It is the solution to the riddle of history and knows itself to be this solution" (Ibid: 89; see also 168-71). As Kolakowski summarizes Marx's thought of this period, "Man under communism is not a prey to chance but is the captain of his fate, the conscious moulder of his own destiny" (1978: 180). Marx clearly envisages a progression by which capitalism gives way to crude communism, which then leads to true communism; and true communism is the fruition of historical development.

A second distinction, with different implications, is articulated in Volume III of *Capital*, the distinction between the "realm of necessity" and the "realm of freedom" (ER: 242-45; cf. Kolakowski, 1978: 308-09). The revolution will not abolish the realm of necessity, for material wants will always have to be satisfied. Granted the abolition of private property, however, as well as the more efficient production techniques introduced through industrial capitalism, necessary drudgery will be so far diminished that all will have the scope and energy to develop their capacities. As Voegelin says, "The realm of necessity would be an industrial society without the bourgeoisie" (ER: 245). Two points are clear from this description. The realm of freedom will coexist with

the realm of necessity and not postdate it: and the activities proper to the realm of freedom are not limited to what is economically productive or politically effective; for economic well-being is possible without strain, and political struggles have been resolved. In the realm of freedom, it seems, Marx allows the *bios theoretike* to be re-introduced.

The eschatological element in both "true communism" and the "realm of freedom" is clear. Voegelin thus calls Marx a "parousiastic thinker", by which he means that Marx "expects deliverance from the evils of the time through the advent, the coming in all its fulness, of being construed as immanent". As Eugene Webb explains, if one wishes to escape from the tensions of existence in the Between, there are only two ways of doing so. One is to seek escape from the world into the beyond - as was the case with the ancient Gnostic movement - and the other is to draw the beyond in some manner into the world (1981: 201).<sup>e</sup>

Naturally the eschatological character of Marx's thought raises serious questions, to which other commentators, both Marxist and non-Marxist, are as fully alive as is Voegelin. Kolakowski (1978: 413-14) notes Marx's lack of interest in such natural (as opposed to the economic) conditions of human existence as death and sickness. In Lash's view, any anthropology which omits to take such factors into account is "intolerably abstract" (1981: 268). Lash also criticizes Marx's "social messianism", his contention that the revolution of which the proletariat is the agent will be the final revolution. This contention relies on the belief that the proletariat has no particular interest of the kind that provokes others' antagonism: but, as Lash suggests, "any revolution which supposes its agency to be thus 'pure' is the victim of an exceedingly dangerous illusion" (*Ibid*: 258, cf. also p. 261). From a different perspective, such theorists of the "Frankfurt School" as

Adorno and Horkheimer, drawing on Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, have pointed out that human domination over nature must by definition include domination over the "nature" *within oneself*, so that any liberation inexorably forges new bonds of repression.<sup>9</sup> And even if the capitalist system is as "inherently unstable and self-contradictory" as Marx thought (Lichtheim: 1970: 115-16, quoting Joseph Schumpeter, an economist otherwise unsympathetic to Marx), it by no means follows that capitalism will give way to a *superior* form of social organization (Dunn, 1979: 80-117).<sup>10</sup>

Voegelin's own main criticism, while consistent with all these and no less telling, is somewhat different. He argues that Marx, blinded by the *realitätsverlust* expressed in his prohibition of questioning, wilfully misrepresented the status of his own theories.<sup>11</sup> As early as 1936, in the essay "*Volksbildung, Wissenschaft und Politik*", Voegelin argued that Marxism is quite wrong to describe itself as a system of "scientific socialism". Instead, it is a salvational mythology sealed off from God, though possessing a range of quasi-religious symbols (e.g. *Capital* as its Bible, Marx and Lenin as its Prophet and Redeemer, the Revolution as its Day of Judgment, the classless society as its paradise). The very claim to be scientific is incoherent, for the conviction that life-stances can be scientifically grounded itself falls under the "rule of faith" (1936: 598, 596).<sup>12</sup>

In *Die politischen Religionen* (1938), Voegelin therefore identifies Marxism as one of a series of secular apocalyptic symbolisms (1986: 61-64). Sciences can only thrive on self-critical questioning and openness to correction. But the "attitude of temporal religiosity" is so strong in these symbolisms that their advocates meet criticism simply by modifying their concept of truth. In other words, truth becomes a "political idea" (see Chapter Five, above), a myth

consciously exploited to unite the masses. Writing in Austria in 1938, Voegelin boldly gives as an illustration Rosenberg's "concept of so-called organic truth"; but "we already find the beginnings in Hobbes' thesis that a teaching which disturbs the unity and the peace of the Commonwealth cannot be true". In this way, by the Nazis as by Marx, "myth formation is withdrawn from rational discussion".

#### *Marx's Abdication of Historical Responsibility*

Voegelin re-states his position on Marx in the essay "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme" (1981: 238-41). In the face of "the well-known evils enumerated by Hesiod" (hard work, disease, injuries inflicted by the powerful on the weak, etc.), one must, indeed, fight for survival and resist injustice. But activists filled with *libido dominandi* "pretend to overcome the imperfection of man's existence". Marx, for his part,

insists energetically that the transfer of the means of production to public property, i.e. the "communism" of today's vulgarian Marxism, will exponentially aggravate the evils of capitalism in the form of private property unless, under the influence of other than economic and legal reforms, the consciousness of man's existence is transfigured (*Ibid*: 238).

Marx is concerned not to tackle specific and remediable injustices but to offer a comprehensive account of reality, covering the historical social and personal dimensions of human life. The new reality is related to existing reality only by negating it according to "the logic of transfiguration".

This interpretation is less than fair to Marx's intention. Marx's opposition to piecemeal reform is based on his conviction that as long as the means of production are in bourgeois control, fairer distribution of resources is inconceivable (1977: 569-70); further, that even to seek such gains would entail a corrupting

accommodation on the part of the proletariat to the bourgeois spirit. We have also seen that "crude communism", whatever its defects, is not to be judged as if it were an autonomous political order. It is the necessary but transitory first phase of an integral process (Marx, 1977: 87-89). Marx's position may be clarified with the aid of the later *Critique of the Gotha Programme*.

Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat (Marx, 1977: 565).

This transitional communist society has not "developed on its own foundations" and Marx admits that it will be "in every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually, still stamped with the birth marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges" (*Ibid*: 568).

But even allowing for these qualifications about Voegelin's interpretation of Marx, Marx's own account is implausible. The present, on Marx's own logic, can never escape the past. If crude communism is scarred by the marks of its origin, Marx is obliged to explain (but does not) why *true communism*, or indeed any conceivable society, is exempt from being so: without such explanation, true communism might be no more than a fantasy. As Voegelin goes on, "One might be inclined to let the dreamers dream and, for one's own part, go on with the business of living our imperfect reality". But dreamers act in the real world, and on the basis of "a superior insight into the truth of reality" can "inflict their murderous nonsense on real human beings" (1981: 240-41).

As Martin Buber carefully explains, Marx recognized "the elements of the new society which have already developed in the womb of the collapsing bourgeois society" (Buber has in mind such structures as Workers'



Co-operatives), but "he could not make up his mind to promote them and sponsor them", because he regarded his prior task as the specific preparation of the revolution. So his practical attitudes to such structures were guided only by political expediency. He claimed to value them, and encouraged labour movements to demand such reforms as would promote them. But his demands had a "tactical-propagandist character"; he did not take the structures seriously (Euber, 1958: 96-97). This assessment, though more gently expressed than Voegelin's judgment that Marx abandons responsible politics in favour of the pursuit of total social transformation, substantially coincides with it. In Euber's view, as in Voegelin's, there is a "yawning chasm" between the future true communism ("no one knows how long after the final victory of the Revolution"), and the road to and beyond the Revolution "characterized by a far-reaching centralization that permits . . . no individual initiative":

Uniformity as a means is to change miraculously into multiplicity as an end; compulsion into freedom. As against this, the "utopian" or non-marxist socialist desires a means commensurate with his ends; he refuses to believe that in our reliance on the future "leap" we have to do now the direct opposite of what we are striving for . . . (Ibid: 13).

On the contrary, writes Euber, "we must create here and now the space *now* possible for the thing for which we are striving, so that it may come to fulfilment *then*."

To use the terminology of Max Weber, Marx rejected the "ethic of responsibility" for the "ethic of ultimate ends" (Weber 1947: 120-21). He presumed, as Voegelin puts it, that a creed "contained its own justification, that the consequences did not matter if the intention was right" (NSP: 16-17). Voegelin insists, as would Euber, that "no excuse for the evil consequences of moralistic action could be found in the morality or nobility of your intentions. . . . Ideologies are not science and ideals are no substitute for ethics" (AM: 11).<sup>3</sup>

According to Voegelin, then, Marx was "derailed" by being diverted from a thorough philosophical exploration of his ideal (his vision of true communism and the spiritual transformation it presupposed), into preparation for the revolution. "If [Marx] had been obliged to produce a revolutionary *renovatio* in his fellowmen through his spiritual authority, not much would have followed except his personal tragedy" (ER: 245). Instead he decided that freedom would follow the overthrowing of the bourgeoisie, and that such a revolution itself had to be prepared and enacted entirely within the realm of necessity. He therefore had, firstly, to expose the contradictions latent in the moribund bourgeois society and, secondly, "to forge the proletarian organization that in the decisive hour would strike the decisive blow". From the 1840s on "the emphasis of his life and work shifts increasingly to the midwifery of the revolution" (ER: 245-46).

The attack on Marx's ethical irresponsibility constitutes the third instance in which I shall try to show that Voegelin falls from philosophy into polemics. He directs his criticism at an address, given in 1850 to the Communist League, in which Marx recommends the shrewdest tactics to implement the revolutionary ideology set out two years before in the *Communist Manifesto*. Voegelin suggests that the idea of gnostic socialism was substantially completed with the *Manifesto*, and that the Address marks the point at which "the eschatological excitement of the *Manifesto* subsided and the problems of revolutionary tactics came to the fore" (ER: 291, 295).

His method is straightforward. He collates those phrases from the Address which most chillingly convey Marx's zeal to foment "permanent revolution", and allows the reader to share his own revulsion at Marx's tactical ruthlessness.<sup>14</sup> Marx writes,

For us, the issue cannot be the alteration of private property but only its annihilation, not the smoothing over of class antagonisms but the abolition of classes, not the improvement of existing society but the foundation of a new one (*Ibid*: 280).

If an alliance between workers and other democrats should succeed in overthrowing the present oppressive government, the workers' actions must preserve the atmosphere of revolutionary fever:

Far from opposing so-called excesses, instances of popular revenge against hated individuals or public buildings . . . such instances must not only be tolerated but the leadership of them taken in hand (*Ibid*: 282).

If the democrats propose proportional taxes, the workers must propose progressive taxes; if the democrats themselves put forward a moderately progressive tax, the workers must insist on a tax with rates that rise so steeply that big capital will be ruined by it . . . Thus the demands of the workers must everywhere be governed by the measures and concessions of the democrats (*Ibid*: 285).

Voegelin concludes, "The details of the advice will change with the situation. The pattern is clear and well-known to all of us: it is the systematic disruption of society in the hope of creating such disorder that the Communist minority can rise to victory" (ER: 297-98).

The reader may be as appalled as Voegelin could wish by Marx's notion of a "permanent revolution". But Voegelin nowhere discusses the place that the Address has in the body of Marx's thought. We are to presume that whereas Marx's *analysis* of bourgeois society was later extended and refined (e.g. in *Capital*), the Address represents his definitive position on revolutionary tactics. But the work of other Marx scholars shows that this supposition is unsafe.

The fact that the Address is not discussed in the extended treatments of Marx and ethics written by Kain, Kamenka and Lukes already suggests that its centrality should not be taken for granted. Kamenka maintains that

at the time of the *Communist Manifesto* and *The German Ideology*, Marx linked morality with law and religion as "so many bourgeois prejudices each concealing bourgeois interests" (1969: 39). Not surprisingly, perhaps, he finds Marx's ethical theory to be incoherent: "In Marxists, and, to a lesser extent in Marx himself, we find an uncritical conflation of ethical relativism, revolutionary ethics, the ethic of self-determination and self-realization, utilitarian strains . . . all assumed or proclaimed rather than argued for" (*Ibid*: 1-2). Kamenka perhaps implies that Marx (at least, the young Marx) used *ethics itself* in a "tactical-propagandist" way, - naturally enough, since he regarded ethics as inherently nothing other than propaganda.

Lukes (1985: 27-47) argues that Marx condemns the morality of *Recht* (i.e. of human rights individually considered) but affirms a morality of *emancipation*. This distinction, though present in Marx's own work, is expressed most concisely by Trotsky: one should not "apply the self-same moral norms to the oppressors and the oppressed", and the appeal to such norms is "not a disinterested philosophical mistake but a necessary element in the mechanics of class deception". This distinction, as Lukes points out, merely raises further questions: what are the ends of socialism, and what means do *they* justify? When pushed, Trotsky answers that anything is permissible "which *really* leads to the emancipation of mankind"; in other words, any actions which unite the proletariat and "teach them contempt for official morality and its democratic echoers". There can be no criterion for what is permissible to revolutionaries other than "the living experience of the movement under the clarification of theory" (*Ibid*: 118-20). Lukes concludes that "Marxism has from its beginning exhibited a certain approach to moral questions that has disabled it from offering moral resistance to measures taken in

its name" (*Ibid*: 141). In this, of course, it is not alone among political movements.

Kain, however, points out that the later Marx does not reject *Recht* so simply: for example in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx

aims to realize rights in the socialist stage, the first stage of communist society, but to transcend rights in the second and higher stage of communist society, and to transcend them in a way which, I think, would preserve them in custom and tradition (1988: 12).

On this account, Marx moved from a position of revolutionary pragmatism according to which ethics are a mere ideological fiction towards an ethical humanism in which the theory of historical materialism holds a more central place than the theory of revolution.

These glimpses of a complex debate at least reveal the nature of the problem from which Voegelin entirely prescind. Further, those scholars, Marxist or not, who do discuss the Address place it in quite a different perspective than does Voegelin. Voegelin notes that the *Manifesto* was published in February, 1848, the month that revolution broke out in Paris, but by 1850 "it was clear that the time for a proletarian world-revolution had not yet come" (ER: 296). Writing in 1933, Nicolaievsky and Maenchen-Helfen regard these circumstances as decisive for the character of the Address:

[the fact] that Marx accepted the kind of revolutionism which he condemned so violently both before and afterwards . . . proves better than anything else the extent to which his judgment had been affected by the breakdown of his immeasurable hopes (1973: 223).

As Bertram Wolfe writes, in 1850 Marx was still "under the spell of the barricade and conspiracy traditions of Paris". Marx's fraught state of mind appears in a letter of November, 1848: "There is only one way to shorten the murderous death agonies of the old society, only one way

to shorten the bloody birth-pangs of the new society - revolutionary terrorism" (1967: 151-52).

Lichtheim says that Marx and Engels soon broke with conspiratorial politics in general and the Communist League in particular. For the remainder of his life, Marx "adamantly refused to engage in revolutionary conspiracy" (1964: 123, 127). In fact, at another meeting of the League as early as September 1850, Marx already separated himself from the Blanquists who were, he thought, stupidly trying to force the pace of revolution:

I have always opposed the ephemeral notion of the proletariat. We devote ourselves to a party which is precisely far from achieving power. Would the proletariat have achieved power, then it would have enacted not proletarian but petty-bourgeois legislation. Our party can achieve power only if and when conditions permit it to realize its *OWN* views (quoted Avineri, 1968: 195-96; on Blanquism, cf. Kolakowski, 1978: 214-16).

If the Address's recommendations as to the manner in which the proletariat might exploit a tactical alliance with the democrat party seem cynical, it is because they reflect a double desperation. The workers' party itself was almost non-existent: but Marx could scarcely advocate that the group abandon the whole struggle; and he was also convinced, not without reason, that "the liberals would not advance one step unless driven on by a popular movement" (Lichtheim, 1964: 75).

None of the foregoing explanations justify the Address, and Voegelin is entirely correct in using it to point up the horrifying consequences of a naked pragmatism put to the service of revolution. As Wolfe remarks, even though Marx did virtually repudiate the Address only six months afterwards and never returned to its position, it would lie

like an undetonated time bomb on the Marxist road to be joyously dug up by Lenin . . . and used with

explosive force as a Marxian manual of Leninist strategy and tactics (1967: 152).

Lenin would have been inconceivable without Marx: and Avineri judges that Marx's "major intellectual blunder" was to overlook the possibility of the possible dialectical development by which there emerged "the combination of his philosophical and historical theory with the Jacobin tradition of merely political, subjectivist revolutionary action" (1968: 258).

But it counts for something that Marx withdrew and corrected his least controlled rhetoric. That is not the behaviour of a spiritually diseased ideologist, or a moral thug. In treating the Address as the paradigm case of the consequences which follow from *realitätsverlust*, Voegelin himself seems impelled by an animus against Marx which amounts to the *libido dominandi*.

### The Case of Conservatism

#### *Claiming Voegelin for Conservatism*

We have noted critiques of Marx from a broadly socialist position, by Buber and by the theorists of the "Frankfurt School". It is clear that to attack Marx is not thereby to defend capitalism. Nevertheless, Voegelin has tended to be neglected by thinkers of the Left and to be regarded with favour by those of the Right.<sup>15</sup> He figures prominently, for example, in George H. Nash's comprehensive and sympathetic survey, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*. Nash also frequently mentions others in Voegelin's circle, such as his sometime publisher Henry Regnery, his translator Gerhart Niemayer ("a hard-line anti-Communist scholar" who became "a leading cold-war strategist"), Russell Kirk, whose book of 1953, *The Conservative Mind*, is thought by Nash to have "dramatically catalyzed the emergence of the conservative intellectual movement", and

Thomas Molnar (Nash, 1976: 111, 90, 69, 78-80 respectively). These men undoubtedly thought of Voegelin as a supporter. Molnar, for example, wrote to Voegelin in October 1969 that he had lectured on Voegelin's political philosophy in the Universities of South Africa and Pretoria, "Afrikaans-language institutions where, in contrast to anglophone ones, philosophical and political ideas are sufficiently 'conservative' for professors to listen to your ideas sympathetically" (Hooy).

Certain institutions with which Voegelin was connected also figure in Nash's book: the Hoover Institution of which he became a Senior Research Fellow ("among the outposts of scholarly, respectable, conservative cold-war analysis"), and the Reim Foundation from which he received financial support (whose role "in financing intellectual conservative causes was unobtrusive but frequently crucial".) (Nash, 1976: 272, 354).

Voegelin is little known in Britain: but Ian Crowther wrote an essay on him in the very first issue of the *Salisbury Review* (1982), launching a series on "Conservative Thinkers". That same issue also contained an article, "On Being Right", by David Levy, whose books of 1981 and 1987 rely heavily on Voegelin.

The term "conservative" needs to be further specified. Both Nash, writing of "Conservatism" in the U.S.A., and Barry (1987), writing of the "New Right" in Britain, include within their scope two divergent streams of thought, the libertarian and the traditionalist. Though the two streams are in several respects opposed to each other (cf., for example, F. A. Hayek's essay, "Why I Am Not a Conservative" in Hayek, 1960: 397-411), they naturally coincide in rejecting all forms of socialism. They might also converge in practice, if, for example, an authoritarian-conservative government were to enforce free-market economics.



It is mainly neo-conservatives who claim Voegelin's philosophical patronage. Neo-liberals might relish his attacks on Marxism, but could hardly overlook his no less trenchant critiques of nineteenth century liberalism. According to John Gray, liberalism's "distinctively modern conception of man and society" is:

*individualist*, in that it asserts the moral primacy of the person against the claims of any social collectivity; *egalitarian*, inasmuch as it confers on all men the same moral status and denies the relevance to legal or political order of differences in moral worth among human beings; *universalist*, affirming the moral unity of the human species and according a secondary importance to specific historic associations and cultural forms; and *meliorist* in its affirmation of the corrigibility of all social institutions and political arrangements (1986: x).

Compare Gray's description with Voegelin's comments on the advocacy, by French liberals of the nineteenth century, of a revolution which is "permanent, but slow and progressive, so that it follows without jolts the progress of reason" (ER: 179):

We see here developing an attitude towards the crisis which remains typical in later liberalism and we can observe in its origins the growth of an escapist cliché. The rhythm of Revolution and Restoration is considered a stupid exaggeration of the process of social reform, the violent swings of the pendulum ought to be toned down - under the title of "permanent revolution" - to the gentle process that today is called "peaceful change" (*Ibid*: 180).

Voegelin thinks the notion of progress guided by reason to be "escapist" because the very fact of a social crisis shows that society's

remedial forces, while perhaps present, are socially ineffective. The social problems which urgently require a solution cannot be solved because the spiritual and moral strength for the task is lacking in the ruling group (*Ibid*).

Therefore, Voegelin says of the "liberal" option of "intelligent gradual reform" that "it does not exist concretely". To counsel it distracts attention from the

only true alternative, "the restoration of spiritual substance in the ruling groups of a society". One might think that Voegelin, in admitting that the "pragmatic value of this alternative . . . is not very high" (*Ibid*), virtually acknowledges that his own option also "does not exist concretely". But his position is starkly opposed to Gray's liberalism. In particular, it attributes what Gray calls "moral primacy" not to individuals as such, but to those rulers possessed of "spiritual substance". Far from being irrelevant to political order, spiritual stature is decisive for it. Conversely the notion of meliorism is deemed escapist.

The moral egalitarianism and meliorism which Gray thinks to belong to liberalism were also criticized in Voegelin's essay of 1944, "Nietzsche, the Crisis and the War":

Democracy, as well as any other form of government, could be good or bad according to the spirit which prevailed. Consent of the people might be given to bad laws, and the bad laws would not be experienced as an infringement of individual rights because the individuals themselves could possibly be dubious figures who liked bad laws (1944a: 187-88).

In the 1960 essay, "Liberalism and its History", Voegelin goes further. He argues that liberalism has no independent character, but merely evolves as a reflection of other movements. Thus, where classical liberalism has been overtaken by more radical revolutionary movements, liberals may in practice be "conservative". Conversely, where the adjective "liberal" carries connotations of "pink", as in the U.S.A., it is simply because there is no effective socialist party to its left (*Ibid*: 507-08).

According to this theory, the political aspect of liberalism was defined by its opposition to certain abuses, especially to the police state, and clerical and

aristocratic privilege: it required the executive state to be separate from the legislative, judicial and ecclesiastical domains. Economic liberalism sought to dismantle existing checks on free economic activity on the presumption that a harmonious social order would thereby emerge. Religious liberalism rejected revelation and dogma as sources of truth. Scientific liberalism posited the autonomy of immanent human reason as the source of knowledge, over against the classical and mediaeval contention that theology and philosophy were the final arbitrators of scientific truth.<sup>17</sup>

Voegelin goes on to argue (*Ibid*: 515-19) that all these four aspects of liberalism have run into difficulties. Political liberalism, for example, accepts "the redemptive value" of certain constitutional models, such as the separation of powers. But such models are always historically contingent: "we know today that societies do not become free through liberal constitutions, but that free societies produce liberal constitutions and can function in their framework". The theory of economic liberalism, as developed by Locke, presupposed a low concentration of population, a predominantly agrarian economy, and a multiplicity of citizens of equal economic potential. "When society differentiated into capitalist and worker, the model of the society of free, equal citizens was overtaken by a reality which pressed towards the crisis of class struggle".<sup>18</sup>

The character of Voegelin's objections to liberalism explains his appeal to neo-conservative thinkers. This appeal, however, is partly based on the circumstance that the works in which he offers most comfort to such conservatives are his best known ones. *The New Science of Politics and Science*, *Politics and Gnosticism* both formed Voegelin's constituency and disproportionately affected the manner in which he has been interpreted. For these two books are more accessible, in a double

sense, than either his huge *Order and History*, or his many other scholarly essays. They are less abstruse and more plainly argued, being each based on a course of lectures; and since they were re-issued in paperback, they are more readily available. This availability, of course, is not an accident, but is the result of conservative patronage. Thus, *The New Science of Politics* was the subject of a special article in 1953 to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of *Time* Magazine; and *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, with its fierce attack on Marx, was published by Henry Regnery's company, Gateway. In contrast, such essays as "Nietzsche, the Crisis and the War" (1944) and "The Oxford Political Philosophers" (1953), which sharply criticize Western assumptions, languish among their journals' back-numbers.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Voegelin's Conservative Reflexes*

It has to be recognized that some aspects of Voegelin's thought and conduct invited appropriation by conservatives. The case of the 1953 article in *Time* is instructive.<sup>20</sup>

The piece, written anonymously, summarizes the book's argument, stressing Voegelin's account of "modern Gnosticism" and its political consequences.<sup>21</sup> *Time* says, "Gnosticism, even in earthly matters, substitutes dreams for reason, because it disregards the facts of the world that exists" (1953: 59): the model case is the rise of the National Socialist movement to power, "with the Gnostic chorus wailing its moral indignation at such barbarian and reactionary doings in a progressive world - without, however raising a finger to repress the rising force by a minor political effort in proper time" (see *NSP*: 171-72). Equally, Gnosticism dominates Western post-war policy. *Time* now gives an extended quotation from the book, which runs, in part,

If a war has a purpose at all . . . . it is the reduction of the unbalancing excess of force, not the destruction of force to the point of creating a new power vacuum. Instead the [Western] Gnostic politicians have put the Soviet army on the Elbe, surrendered China to the Communists, at the same time demilitarized Germany and Japan, and in addition demobilized our own army (1953: 59, cf. NSP; 172).

Because the West held the "Gnostic dream assumption" that a peaceful international order would peacefully evolve by the dismantling of armies, it created a power vacuum to its own disadvantage.

What is especially significant is the inferences drawn by the *Time* article from this analysis. Firstly, the Cold War is merely a function of the West's proper practice of responsible politics. Gnostics accept "war to end war", or war "as a prelude to peace". But

Cold war they shun because its objectives are less than the salvation of mankind, and because cold war requires careful calculation of causes and effects, means and ends in the real world (1953: 59).

Similarly, all opposition to the U.S.A.'s full-blooded attempts "to win the Korean war" can be ascribed to the gnostic belief that no war is permissible except total war, or "Armageddon".<sup>22</sup>

Secondly, *Time* simply assumes that the United States represents human freedom. In order to gain worldwide influence, America has mistakenly boasted of its affluence, rather than approaching the world "on the level of the great truths of Western culture, of the institutions of freedom that reflect those truths": on the contrary, it must newly grasp its own heritage, for "The World's way out of Gnostic confusion depends very largely on the U.S." (1953: 60, 61).

Now Voegelin himself would never, even during the Stalinist epoch, have claimed that American institutions

simply "reflect the truth of freedom". That claim exemplifies what Karl Mannheim describes as conservative utopianism, by which the "here and now" is experienced as embodying the highest values and meanings (1936: 229-39). *Time's* claim for Americanism is itself "gnostic", as Voegelin emphasizes (in a sentence not quoted by *Time*): "The Western Gnostic societies are in a state of intellectual and emotional paralysis because no fundamental critique of left-wing gnosticism is possible without blowing up right-wing gnosticism in its turn" (NSP; 178).

*Time* has undoubtedly misrepresented Voegelin's book by seizing for its own purposes on one of its lines of meaning at the expense of others. The matter acquires its special interest because of Voegelin's two dissimilar responses to the article. Returning home after a spell in hospital, he wrote to the editor of *Time* on March 30, 1953, complimenting him on giving space to the discussion of a "severely theoretical work". Moreover, he went on, your attempt has been splendidly successful. You have seen, what probably not too many will see, that the theoretical propositions are applicable to the concrete questions of our time. . . . I am sure your article will help even professionals in the field of political science to understand the pragmatic value of my analysis (Hooy).

However, to a certain Jos. Paul Morris, who sent him a lengthy telegram of dissent, he replied on March 31,

I am afraid I must point out to you that (1) I am not connected with *Time* magazine, and (2) am not responsible for what people write about me.

If Mr. Morris is interested in what Voegelin has to say, he should buy the book, for "less than the expense of your telegram":

Finally, I inform you herewith that you have no business to molest a scholar with your opinion about his ideas without knowing what they are. In view of the fact that you have not read the book, your telegram is an impertinence (Hooy).

This pardonable indignation does seem to be at odds with the enthusiasm he had expressed to *Time* itself. More

significantly, Voegelin did not demur from *Time's* use of his argument to buttress its recommended policy on Korea and the Cold War.

I pass to another example of Voegelin's allowing himself to be co-opted into the fold of ideological conservatism. In 1959, he wrote a paper (translated in 1961 as "On Readiness to Rational Discussion"), which gives a shrewd account of the ploys which "philodoxers" typically use to avoid genuine discussion: verbosity and filibustering to preclude debate; avoiding the point at issue in favour of innuendos about the opponent's psychology or material interests; "positionism", or classifying the opponent's argument as dependent on some position (e.g. Marxism, Catholicism, Platonism) which one has previously labelled as intellectually unrespectable; the dogmatic exemption of one's own presuppositions or "values" from discussion; and the appeal to "science" to disallow the dimension of spirit (1961c: 278-81). The paper is enlightening. Disconcertingly, however, it appears in a book, *Freedom and Serfdom*, which seems intended as a Cold War tract rather than a self-critical search for truth. Its editor declares that it is "dedicated to the moral and intellectual struggle against communism", "to instil a sense of urgency and vigilance, particularly in the younger generation, and to imbue them with courage and an eager readiness to fight for the ideals of the western world" (Hunold, 1961: 9). Of the book's other contributors, several belong to the conservative Mont Pèlerin Society, and some combine a rabid view of the Soviet Union with a romanticized view of the West: cf. especially the essays of Hans Kohn, Russell Kirk and Helmut Schoek: (Hunold, 1961: 49-58; 95-106; 238-68). In particular, Schoek's certitude that the Soviet Union will always see fit to disregard any international agreement for tactical-revolutionary reasons is *itself* a form of "resistance to rational discussion": it projects political cynicism exclusively outward from the U.S.A.,

and is unfalsifiable in that no evidence of the Soviet Union's adherence to treaty obligations could cause him to modify his assessment (Schoeck, 1961; 243. 252). To be sure, Voegelin did not choose his co-contributors, but it is unlikely that he meant his description of irrationality to discredit them.<sup>23</sup>

These two examples make it difficult to imagine Voegelin as a philosopher who stands above the ideological fray. To say this is not itself a criticism. But sometimes his analyses fail to advert to their own ideological aspects. Let us take an instance from the *Autobiographical Memoir*. He acknowledges his American sympathies frankly: "after all I had to run for my life from the political environment in Central Europe and I was received with kindness in America" (AM: 119). But then, expressing the hope that his observations on the U.S.A. are not unduly coloured by this prejudice, he goes on (*Ibid*: 119-23) to argue that the American revolution, in contrast to other revolutions, "was able to create successfully an open society, with a minimum of violence required for its imposition", and was not animated by "anti-Christian animosity".<sup>24</sup>

After describing the remaining "social problems which require solutions too long delayed", such as the status of the black population, he points to the major problem of the Vietnam war. Whether the national interest demanded entry into that war was open to question, but once involved "one cannot simply end a war by walking out of it". He blames the horrors of physical destruction in Vietnam entirely on Vietnam's "ruling group of totalitarian sectarians", who were "willing to sacrifice the people to the bitter end for its domination", and he attributes the anti-war protest in America itself to ignorance worked by propaganda:

That a war has two parties, and that the destruction was caused by the other party, who happened to be



the military victim of the destruction, was simply not raised into consciousness. The bombing of German cities into vast fields of rubble, as well as the mass killings of the civilian population . . . was taken with equanimity. Comparable destruction on a minor scale in an underdeveloped country aroused horror. That these horrors were caused by ideological sectarians and not by the American government was disregarded (*Ibid*: 121-22).

Voegelin's opinion in this matter could doubtless be defended. But his argument might just as readily demonstrate the moral inadmissibility of Allied strategy in the Second World War as the legitimacy of American strategy in Vietnam. In fact, the structure of his argument suggests that he could not conceive of anyone's challenging the morality of the Allies' Second World War strategy of saturation bombing. In the case of Vietnam, similarly, what is striking is his refusal even to acknowledge that the American government has a moral case to answer (since any critics are labelled propagandists), and his refusal to consider, as a possibility, that America's military policy-makers might be ideologists themselves. The horrors, he says, are simply *not caused* by the American government, just as the foundation of the American "open society" on the dispossession and slaughter of the native Americans seems to count for him only as "minimal violence". In such passages Voegelin is seen as public relations officer, not philosopher.<sup>28</sup>

The above examples show that Voegelin must be considered to belong to one sub-section of American conservatism. It seems to be a matter of temperament and political instinct, however, rather than of theory. I have, in Chapter Eight, already discussed and rejected the suggestion that Voegelin conceives human nature as fixed. Were this true, it would certainly have conservative implications. In his view, the limits of human nature are such as to rule out the attainment of a society so totally transformed that further struggle is

superfluous: but this conviction naturally permits a wide range of political choices.

There is one further aspect of his thought which seems to invite conservative appropriation; his attitude to rulership, and to authority in general. We have cited his claim that the true political alternative to a liberal faith in incremental institutional reform is "the restoration of spiritual substance in the ruling groups of a society" (ER: 180). Naturally, this formulation does not commit him to supporting those rulers now in power while they await conversion. It might equally require their overthrow in favour of some group better fitted to govern. But the strong hierarchical assumptions of the prescription are manifest.

So, for example, he reports with approval Hooker's opposition to the "gnostic Puritans" of his day (NSP 137-44). They, argues Voegelin, closed themselves off from rational discussion by formulating a standardized interpretation of Scripture (what Voegelin calls a "koran") which dispensed with the need for the believer's personal openness to truth. Since, as we have noted, Voegelin sees affinities between the Puritan revolutionaries and the Marxists of his own day, his comment is significant: Hooker had to contemplate the possibility

that a debate, which could not end with agreement through persuasion, would have to be closed by governmental authority . . . . [because] Gnostic propaganda is political action and not perhaps a search for truth in the theoretical sense. . . . A democratic government is not supposed to become an accomplice in its own overthrow by letting Gnostic movements grow prodigiously in the shelter of a muddy interpretation of civil rights . . . . [but will have to] put down the danger by force and, if necessary, to break the letter of the constitution in order to save its spirit (*Ibid*: 143-44).

One can accept that governments cannot wait till all disputes are settled before acting to preserve public order and yet find this argument ominous. It embodies

the instinctive assumption that existing governments represent truth, that rulers indeed strive to *save the spirit* of the constitution, rather than merely seek to maintain their own domination. It is that *assumption*, not necessarily the explicit arguments rooted in it, which is conservative. To the extent that the assumption guides political practice it amounts to an *ideology* of conservatism, by dissuading one from the responsible criticism of existing governments.

### *Conservative Ideological Readings of Voegelin*

I hope to have shown that Voegelin bears some responsibility for encouraging the conservative interpretation of his work, rather as there are lines of meaning in Marx's own writings which lead to the Marxist-Leninism sequel. Nevertheless, I wish to argue that the conservative appropriation of his work is wilfully selective.

Crowther's brief exposition of Voegelin shows why it is principally one grouping within the Right which finds Voegelin's thought congenial, namely "conservatives" over against economic liberals or "anti-collectivists":

An uncritical reverence for business is a mark of commercialism not conservatism. Business has its rightful place in society, but the true conservative will be aware that there is much worth conserving, community, craftsmanship, small firms, public manners and mores, towards which business is at best indifferent, at worst hostile (1982: 18).

Crowther correctly contrasts two of Voegelin beliefs, "that 'civilizational order' must be created and maintained by minorities", and that social order depends on cultivation, among rulers and ruled alike, of the "well-ordered soul", with the basic tenets of liberal individualism: that "order is spontaneously generated; that the public interest is merely the sum of private interests; that no authoritative conception of the good life can be set above the personal 'value-judgements' of

individuals". But his summary of "Voegelin's view" is seriously flawed:

all the movements of the modern age, from the mildest forms of progressivism to the most virulent types of totalitarian ideology, are variants of the heresy known as Gnosticism (*Ibid*: 20).

Not only had Voegelin moved well away from this position by 1982, but the argument is also self-defeating, since "conservatism" in Crowther's sense is not a naïve adherence to unquestioned traditions but is itself a "movement of the modern world". In fact, as we shall shortly see, Voegelin regards conservatism itself as a "secondary ideology".

David Levy, in proclaiming himself to be "a man of the Right" (1982: 4), denies that Conservatives revere antiquity as such. Rather, they seek to revive those lost social forms which best meet the essential human needs: so that, in the words Levy cites from Gustave Thibon, "the face of the past has no attraction at all except in so far as it reflects the eternal" (*Ibid*; 6). For Levy, "Right-mindedness" denotes a belief in the primacy of nature over history, of being over becoming, of the fixed over the fluid. From this belief "derive such typical doctrines as the importance of tradition, the limitations of human nature, and the fragility of civilisation" (*Ibid*; 7).

For Levy, therefore, conservatism follows from the stance he calls "Realism":

Realism in the human sciences focuses upon the historically and archeologically warranted assumption that a relatively stable human nature exists which combines aggressive and co-operative elements, and that political orders, in all their variety, reflect the nature of the human animal who makes them up (1981: 102).

Levy claims that Voegelin is in this sense a realist. The polar position to realism, he suggests, is the

phenomenology of Husserl, for whom reality is subjectively constituted. Whereas for Husserl "the source of order must always lie in the activity of a transcendental subject" (*Ibid*: 120-21), Voegelin considers that human creativity is itself a response to the objective structure of reality.<sup>26</sup>

In a later book, Levy praises Voegelin's achievement in clarifying the relationship of symbols to experience. Such potent political symbols as "Justice", "State", "Race", and "Class"

are neither arbitrary labels whose "true" meaning could be settled by a philosopher's definition nor simple linguistic reflections of substantial realities that exist apart from the dynamics of human action (1987: 87).

According to a realist theory of symbols, "justice", say, is both objective (it is an experienced reality of which the meaning is not to be arbitrarily settled by definition) and subjective (because it does not exist apart from the dynamics of human action).

So far, so good: but when Levy turns to another potent political symbol, "social justice", he appeals not to Voegelin but to F. A. von Hayek, whom he takes to have provided "an incomparable analysis of the emptiness of such a notion, as well as of the harm to which its apparent plausibility leads. . . . It is enough to note that the emergence of such a notion is inevitable once men begin to conceive the world as subject to the demands of a subjectivity which recognizes no independent measure" (*Ibid*: 168-69).<sup>27</sup>

Now for Voegelin, society is no less a reality than are the individual person and the cosmos. The very first sentence of *Order and History* states that reality has a "quaternarian structure" by which "God and man, world and society form a primordial community of being" (*OH* I: 1). It follows that "social justice is a legitimate, indeed

necessary specification of justice itself; that like justice in general it is *both* subjective and objective. In endorsing Hayek's characterization of "social justice" as entirely subjective, Levy precisely *rejects* Voegelin's realism.<sup>29</sup>

Levy's criticism of Jürgen Habermas (1987: 163-66, 183-84) indicates how Levy's "realism" differs from Voegelin's specifically in its conservative implications. Habermas offers a critique of those institutions which by fixing unequal power relations, impede free human communication. This critique, replies Levy, dismisses "in an unjustifiably high-handed way"

the anthropological case for the necessity of a taken-for-granted reality as a precondition for the possibility of all human activity (*Ibid*: 164).

Habermas, says Levy, has an "ideologically founded impatience with all existing and hence imperfect orders" (*Ibid*: 184). By implication, therefore, Levy takes "realism", the priority of the fixed over the fluid, to require the taking-for-granted of institutions: that is, not merely the human need for institutions as such, but *existing* institutions.

This implication becomes manifest when Levy concludes his "work of analysis and reflection" (*Ibid*: 192-94) by remarking that mature individuals must accept a degree of reciprocity between themselves and the state and renounce the "chrysaline state of nonreciprocal dependence". But he then defines the citizens' duty as *maintaining society's institutions in being*. The "so-called Peace Movement", for instance, ignores the "imperatives of [the] political condition" by assuming that

expenditure on national defence, which remains the precondition for the preservation of a relatively autonomous private sphere within an independent political whole, is . . . somehow less valuable than the provision of nonconditional benefits in education and welfare (*Ibid*: 193).

Since the "Peace Movement" opposes not the need for defence as such, but certain specific defence policies, Levy's argument is empty unless he regards the *existing* military establishment and its spending patterns as part of the "taken-for-granted reality". By virtue of his "realism", then, he must logically deny that defence expenditure must always be measured against other priorities, and that its advocates are not immune from becoming ideologists themselves.<sup>29</sup>

According to Voegelin's account of the metaxy, we always exist in the tension between perfection and imperfection. Therefore, life is permanently marked by struggle, and in all spheres of political and personal life the imperfect *must not* be taken for granted, even though it can never be decisively replaced by the perfect. In equating political maturity with selective political docility Levy dissolves the metaxic tension in a way that Habermas's own "ideologically founded impatience" does not.

As a last example of the misuse of Voegelin's thought, I take the work of the American Roman Catholic, James V. Schall. He draws heavily on Voegelin in his academic writing (e.g. 1987: 182-240), but also tends to underwrite his own popular polemics with Voegelin's authority. In his 1988 article "University and Church", for example, Schall attacks those Catholic universities in the U.S.A. which claim that "academic freedom" entitles them to dissent from "the official Church's position on this or that view". To support his argument he cites Voegelin's disparaging remarks on the power of ideologies within American colleges (1988: 30-31, cf. *Conv*: 16-17). He fails to mention what he must be aware of, Voegelin's contention (explored in Chapter Three of this study), that ecclesiastical authority itself has consistently obscured spiritual truth by its imposition of doctrinally orthodox formulae.<sup>30</sup>

*Voegelin's Repudiation of Conservatism*

In order to conclude that Voegelin is misrepresented by some of his conservative interpreters, one must show what effectively separates him from conservatism. As we saw in Chapter Five, the symbol "Order" means to him nothing like "old prescriptions" and "sound prejudice". Order requires the unremitting resistance to disorder:

The justice of the polis is not positive law in the modern sense but rather essential law within which alone there arises the tension between *phusei dikaion* and a possible derailment into the making of laws by arbitrary human will (AN-E: 59).

In Chapter Seven, we contrasted Voegelin's view of tradition with that of Anthony Quinton, for whom it enshrines "the historically accumulated political wisdom of the community". In Voegelin's view, Plato's Socrates and the prophet Jeremiah are paradigms of that individual consciousness which represents spiritual order *over against* society. For, as Lonergan explains, within the "dialectic of community" a social order embodies "bias" as well as wisdom (1958: 222-44).

Even in *The New Science of Politics*, Voegelin criticized Hobbes (though in milder terms than he attacked Hobbes's opponents) for committing the "Gnostic misdeed" of dissolving the tension between the truth sought through consciousness and a civil order which purports to be absolute (NSP: 152-61, 186-87).<sup>31</sup> The tension Hobbes dissolves is permanent: in a decisively anti-conservative formulation, Voegelin writes,

Balances that work for a while can be found and have been found. But habituation, institutionalization, and ritualization inevitably, by their finiteness, degenerate sooner or later into a captivity of the spirit that is infinite; and then the time has come for the spirit to break a balance that has become demonic imprisonment (OH I: 183).



In an important passage written ten years later (An-E: 187-90), Voegelin expanded this formulation, effectively repudiating some of those who invoke his support. Ideologies "constitute a language of obsession designed to prevent the contact with reality". To regain that contact always requires *periagoge*. Rebellion against "theological and metaphysical dogmatisms" is not necessarily a conversion towards the ground, of course, because one's own ideology might be even less adequate to reality than the dogmatisms themselves. But the dogmatisms, too, "suffer from a kind of loss of reality" which itself provoked the ideological rebellion; and the rebellion, even if not itself an act of noesis may have been "a historical accomplishment in the service of noesis". In any case it cannot be undone. Voegelin concludes that "attempts of return, motivated by the totalitarian climax of the rebellion",

could not go beyond the older dogmatism to the reality of knowledge itself. They therefore have produced a curious gray zone of thought about order that is as characteristic a phenomenon of the time as the ideologies themselves, to which it is opposed. One might speak of an area of secondary ideologies. . . . Its most important linguistic symbols are the "traditions" and the "conservatisms" (*Ibid*: 188-89).

In his correspondence, though not in his published writings, Voegelin repeatedly and explicitly rejected conservatism. Sometimes, admittedly, he adopted a somewhat ambivalent stance of sympathetic disaffiliation, as in his correspondence with David Collier, the editor of *Modern Age* (which calls itself "A Conservative Journal"). In 1960, as Executive Director of the Institute for Philosophical and Historical Studies, Collier secured Voegelin's agreement to give a talk, phrasing his invitation in this way: "We, of course, are especially interested in the problem of the spiritual and moral values in the defence of the West and would hope that you would emphasize this aspect". But in 1961, Voegelin

declined to be a special "Academic Member" of the Institute, telling Collier that "it would impair the objectivity of my work if anybody could point to such an affiliation". I speak of ambivalence because this reply could be taken to mean that Voegelin's knows his support of conservatism will be more effective if it is discreet.

Later he seems to have lost much of his sympathy with conservatism. In a letter of June 1972 to Henry Regnery, he wrote, "When I came here to the Hoover Institution, I was put under certain pressure to become a member of the Philadelphia Society". Voegelin at first knew only of its reputation for being conservative: but as he tells Regnery, his experience resulted in "serious misgivings" about the Society: partisan "conservatives", like "liberals" were simply out of touch with serious philosophy (Hoov).

What Voegelin means by this is explained in a letter written as early as November 1955 to his close friend Robert Heilman. American conservatives have "no philosophical understanding of political problems". "Probably not a single one of them has ever worried about the problem of unanalysed concepts". American "political intellectuals" of this kind (here Voegelin refers explicitly to Russell Kirk) express "solid American evangelism and revivalism transposed into the secular key". Such conservatives, like their opponents, "have broken with the reality of existence in the present".

But don't take too seriously what I say, for I have no well-founded knowledge of these things. I don't read this type of literature, because the authors are no partners in a discussion; these things are only an *object* of investigation, and at the moment I have not much time for them (Hoov).

If this dismissal has an air of geniality, Voegelin could be much more severe. I conclude this chapter with a stinging letter he wrote in October, 1964, to his

associate and translator Gerhart Niemayer, and which makes his position as plain as one could wish:

At the Chicago meeting of the American Political Science Association, I have been told, there was a breakfast meeting conducted by you. . . . the subject matter apparently was my work in political science, given a strong slant towards conservative politics. Among those present, apparently, were a number of persons who would hardly qualify as political scientists, but rather looked like adherents of some radical rightist group.

Voegelin adds "the following cautionary statement":

Any move undertaken by whomsoever, apt to associate my work as a scholar with any political party, group, or movement whatsoever, but especially with Goldwater, conservatism, or rightist groups, is made, not only without my permission or tacit consent, but against my declared intention. I consider any such attempt at association as an attack on the intellectual integrity of my work.

## CHAPTER TEN

## RESPONSIBLE POLITICS: VOEGELIN'S POSITIVE CONCEPTION

Linguistic Probity and Linguistic Corruption

Voegelin has said that the satirist Karl Kraus was for him an "influence of the first magnitude", because Kraus, throughout his life, attacked the prevalent linguistic corruption of his age, focusing especially on its political ramifications. According to Voegelin, Kraus aimed "to restore reality through the restoration of language" (AM: 17-18).

In this study Voegelin himself has sometimes been accused of loose or tendentious rhetoric.<sup>1</sup> So it is important to appreciate that Voegelin means by linguistic corruption something more significant than intemperate diction. As he says of Kraus, the concern with language "was part of the resistance against ideologies", inasmuch as the ideologist "has lost contact with reality and develops symbols for expressing, not reality but his state of alienation from it (AM: 17-18). In Kraus's view, corrupt language is a reliable indicator of the presence of ideology; and conversely, care in the use of language is a salutary exercise of philosophical, and even of political responsibility.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, language is to be judged by the same criterion as that by which symbols are assessed for their adequacy, according to whether or not it retains contact with human experience or systematically excises whole realms of that experience. As Voegelin remarks in commending Solzhenitsyn,

In resistance to the dominance of idols, i.e. of language symbols that have lost their contact with reality, one has to rediscover the experiences of reality as well as the language that will adequately express them (AM: 96).<sup>3</sup>

Linguistic corruption, therefore, both expresses and disseminates the loss of reality. In the unpublished section of his essay of 1970, "The Eclipse of Reality" (Hooy: only the first ten pages were published), Voegelin speaks of the "pneumopathological phenomenon" of a language that repudiates spirit, perhaps referring by this phrase to the *nosos* (the spiritual, not psychological disease) of which he had elsewhere accused Comte and Marx.<sup>4</sup>

The key *political* implication of linguistic corruption is identified in Solzhenitsyn's Nobel Lecture:

Violence does not and cannot flourish by itself; it is inevitably intertwined with *lying*. . . . nothing screens violence except lies, and the only way lies can hold out is by violence. Whoever has once announced violence as his *method* must inexorably choose lying as his *principle* (1972: 32-33).

Voegelin goes further than Solzhenitsyn, arguing that rhetorical extravagance is almost as politically sinister as outright lying. In a lecture delivered in Munich in the year 1965-66, he alluded transparently to Heidegger, speaking of "the famous philosopher who had great linguistic and linguistic-philosophical ambitions, but in the matter of language had such little sensitivity that he was taken in by the author of *Mein Kampf*".<sup>5</sup> Voegelin substantiated his aspersion by quoting from a discussion in *Being and Time* about the nature of signs. The text "transposes factual relationships of our everyday world into a linguistic medium that begins to take on an alliterative life of its own, and thus loses contact with the thing itself" (1985: 11). Voegelin suggests that Heidegger's writing as a whole exhibits this estrangement: we might

construct something of a philosophical dictionary, from A to Z; and proceeding through it, from the *Anwesen des Anwesenden*, to the *Dingen des Dings* and the *Nichten des Nichts*, and on over finally to the *zeigenden Zeichen des Zeigzeugs*, we could whip ourselves up into a reality-withdrawing state of linguistic delirium (*Ibid*).<sup>6</sup>

By arguing that the "character of language stamps the character of the public scene", Voegelin was implying that the thousands who shouted the alliterative *Heil Hitler!* were kindred spirits of Heidegger (*Ibid*: 12), and that Heidegger had fostered a climate of coarseness of spirit in which a grotesque figure like Hitler could become politically effective, rather than be pushed to the margins of German life. It is in this way that Voegelin saw the critique of language as an act of spiritual and political responsibility.<sup>7</sup>

The question arises, of course, whether one can make such confident inferences about the state of individual or collective consciousness from the use of language. Language is clearly both a cause and an effect of states of mind: but it is also the effect of other causes than state of mind, such as one's level of education and the prevalent usage of one's surrounding linguistic community. In the words of Marx, "language itself is the product of a community, just as it is in another respect itself the presence of the community" (cited Lash, 1981: 44). Voegelin would agree with Marx on this point. In his late work he wrote of "the complex of consciousness-reality-language" (*OH V*: 16-18), thereby denying to language any non-reciprocal causative status.<sup>8</sup>

Concern with language, therefore can only be a part of the resistance to ideologies. Such resistance presumes above all the will to retain contact with the primary realities of existence (*AM*: 96). Thus, in a lecture, "Moral Bases for Communication in a Free Society", given at Marquette University, Milwaukee, in 1956 (*Hooy*),

Voegelin distinguished between pragmatic and substantive communication. The former induces people to behave in a certain way, "always with the proviso 'no questions asked' about the morality and legitimacy of the purpose". Such purposes, even if intrinsically defensible "have already a shadow of the improper and immoral because clear articulation is part of moral action". Substantive communication "has for its purpose the unfolding and building up of personality".<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, the attempt to speak plainly and define one's terms is a mental hygiene which is also a politically significant service of truth. As Kolakowski writes, "there is never a shortage of arguments to support any doctrine you want to believe in for whatever reasons" (1982: 16). However, clearly articulated arguments are not thereby barren. They promote the exercise of conscience by elucidating the *status quaestionis*. Voegelin tells, for instance (Conv 146-47), how in his seminars each person must "say what he means when he wants to use [the word] *value*". He adds that he distrusts "the 'isms' we throw around as if we knew what we were talking about";

Optimism, pessimism, nihilism, egotism and so on are all eighteenth century new language. The social "isms" - liberalism, conservatism, capitalism, communism - all appeared between 1810 and 1850.

If one abstains from such terms and specifies the experiences one is talking about, "suddenly people become sane; they are not permitted to talk nonsense" (*Ibid*). But Voegelin knows that it is equally true that clear articulation presupposes the search for truth which it signifies. Substantive communication presumes *good faith*, of which linguistic probity is a necessary but not sufficient condition.

Good faith is the opposite of that attitude described in Book I of *The Ring and the Book*, which might nowadays

be called ideological consciousness: "The instinctive theorizing whence a fact/Looks to the eye as the eye likes the look". So Voegelin argued, in his Marquette lecture, that one major obstacle to substantive communication is the substitution of "sincerity" or "conviction" for conscience. Whereas the "sincere" assume the right to make judgments without due knowledge or reflection, conscience makes rational moral judgments, which others are permitted to challenge.<sup>10</sup>

### Reasoned Pragmatism

#### *Spirit, Power and Competence*

To set out the necessary context for Voegelin's conception of practical politics will also serve to recapitulate the philosophical roots of his political theory. In "Industrial Society in Search of Reason" (1963: 34), he summarizes six "postulates of classical politics": (1) every human person participates in the transcendent Nous, or Logos; (2) the life of reason consists of actualizing this participation for the development of character; (3) human beings are equally capable of the life of reason, but (for whatever reason) are unequal in the application of their potentiality; (4) those who live by reason are a minority in every society; (5) every society has a "de facto hierarchical structure in terms of actualizing the life of reason" (which implies that hierarchy is not to be postulated on any other basis); (6) "The 'quality' of society depends on the degree to which the life of reason, actively carried out by a minority of its members, becomes a creative force in that society".

The purpose of politics, then, is to establish (always provisionally) the "good society", namely the one in which the life of reason becomes socially effective. To this end, responsible politics requires three elements to be



held together; power, spirit, and common sense. Plato's renunciation of three extreme solutions to the problem of political order (QH III: 224-28) is paradigmatic for Voegelin. Firstly, once the cosmological order had given way to an order in which "the problem of [spiritual] regeneration had become personal", a shared spiritual understanding could not be *imposed* on people. Nor could a second solution (later to be advocated by Machiavelli) be considered: that the realm of spirit be excluded from politics, so that a "Prince" might legitimately seek to unite the populace through the exercise of power alone, leaving the necessary spiritual order to be instilled from some other source:

the violent, tyrannical solution, which at first sight might appear as a solution by power alone, involves in fact the corruption of the spirit, for the soul of the tyrant would have to close itself demonically against the law of the spirit that doing evil is worse than suffering evil. A Plato will be tempted, but he will not fall (*Ibid*: 225).

Thirdly, Plato declined the course of radical withdrawal from the sphere of power into a restricted circle of those concerned with the spirit.<sup>11</sup>

The classical postulates must be supplemented with others which classical philosophy did not articulate (1963: 35, 37-39). Two are relevant to our argument at this point. The classical concept assumes that a sizeable percentage of people are "slaves by nature": and if they are incapable of responsible citizenship, it is pointless to consult them about society's affairs, so that their social function is merely to provide the economic basis of *others'* life of reason. This assumption, says Voegelin, "can be dismissed out of hand, since it has been replaced by the Jewish-Christian concept of man as an image of God".<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, because the "psychic tension of the life of reason" is difficult for most people to bear, societies

develop species of "mass belief" which may threaten the life of reason or marginalize its adherents. Mass belief and the life of reason co-exist in every society. But when the life of reason is marginalized, society has to find some alternative principle of common life, what Voegelin calls a "civil theology". Civil theologies seek to be useful, not true. Among them are "the attempts of sectarian communities to impose by force their immanentist beliefs on a society as a state cult" (i.e. the great ideological movements); the attempt to preserve a neutral public realm, separate from the "private" life of reason and spirit, so that tolerance is extended to all groups which do not themselves make a political issue of their faith (the limited Lockean tolerance which excludes Catholics, Levellers, etc); and that kind of constitutional democracy which allows free rein to intellectual and spiritual movements only so long as they award a quasi-sacred status to the constitution itself (*Ibid*: 35-37).<sup>13</sup>

In Voegelin's view, civil theologies inevitably lead to irresponsible politics. We have already considered the impact of the great ideologies. But Voegelin also criticizes the civil theology of constitutional democracy (not, that is, democracy as such) by which a society's quality is ascribed to one specific form of social organization (*Ibid*: 41-43). Therefore, though Voegelin passionately condemns the particular patterns of conduct inculcated by such movements as Communism or National Socialism, he argues that movements which oppose them at the level of content may well be united with them in relying on the method he calls "artificiality in politics" (ER: 70-71). Politics becomes "artificial" when "the growth of the soul through an internal process which is nourished through communication with transcendental reality is replaced by the formation of conduct through external management". Such politics consists in "forming the useful member of society while neglecting or

even deliberately destroying the life of the soul", and attempting to determine "patterns of social conformance without raising the question of the morality of the pattern or of the morality of conformance".<sup>14</sup>

Political order is always informed by *some* spiritual vision. Voegelin argues that the "mass beliefs" of the modern world have displaced the classical vision of the "good society". He therefore believes his own purpose to be at once theoretical and practical: to recover the classical vision (for a far more complex society than the Greek polis), though in a form enriched by subsequent noetic differentiations, especially that of Christianity.

The loss of the the classical vision, (indeed, of any conscious orientation to the transcendent good) has destructive practical consequences, which Voegelin discusses in "Nietzsche, the Crisis and the War". The new spiritual situation discerned by Nietzsche is evoked in the symbol of the Last Man in *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. The Last Man is the one who is lost spiritually, who seeks only warmth, neighbourliness, "not too much work, protection against disease, a sufficient measure of drugs to create pleasant dreams . . . . all want to be the same and want to be equal" (1944a: 179). But despiritualized existence is only a shortlived possibility, for when the organizing power of the spirit is weakened,

the result is not a peacably happy despiritualized society, but a chaos of instincts and values. Despiritualized happiness is the twin brother of despiritualized brutality (*Ibid*: 180).

Therefore, Nietzsche predicted "wars as there have never been wars on earth". His prediction, writes Voegelin, was intended as empirical description, not hyperbole. He envisaged the breakdown of the "framework of political ordinates" (e.g. the ambitions of dynasties and nations) which had determined the *limited* objectives of war: henceforth, wars would express the struggle of instincts,

of blind preservation of or attacks on the *status quo*: they would have motives but no purposes:

Politics in the traditional sense of statesmanlike action within an accepted order of purposes comes to an end . . . ; in the formulation of Nietzsche, "Politics is dissolved entirely in a war of the spirits" (*Ibid*: 180-81).

"Statesmanlike action", in other words is action in which power, spirit and common sense are accorded their place. It presupposes, firstly, political leaders' access to power and capacity for common sense; and secondly, that the shared purposes which transcend specifically political acts nevertheless animate them.

Of course, Voegelin does not mean that the earlier "framework of political ordinates" (such as dynastic consolidation or expansion) necessarily embodied the life of reason. Political actions and purposes often failed to distinguish between the order of political necessity and the higher order of moral action.<sup>15</sup> Even Thucydides, who rightly recognizes the exigencies both of the "order of necessity" and the "order of morality", is mistaken in seeing them as two *autonomous* orders in tragic collision:

the sphere of power and pragmatic rationalism is not autonomous but part of human existence which as a whole includes the rationality of spiritual and moral order. If the controlling order of spirit and morality breaks down, the formation of ends in the pragmatic order will be controlled by the irrationality of passions; the co-ordination of means and ends may continue to be rational but action nevertheless will become irrational (*QH II*: 363).

If, on the one hand, Thucydides's history shows that power uncontrolled by spirit is destructive (and therefore irresponsible), spirit (even uncorrupted spirit) will likewise be irresponsible unless it accepts the burden of power and is checked by common sense. This point may be illustrated from a typescript of about 1947, entitled "Clericalism" (*Hooy*), in which Voegelin traces the successes and failures of the Church in the face of

modern civilization.<sup>16</sup> He judges that the Church has succeeded in one sense. In the general civilizational crisis,

the Church emerges today as the one major social institution which has kept alive the flame of the spirit, which has preserved intact the order of the soul, and which at the same time, has continued to cultivate the critical instruments of the philosophizing intellect.

But it has failed in the discharge of its proper societal role. That role is not, he thinks, to develop a positive social programme, because the Church's primary task is to enable its members to live authentically in *any* social order. It ought rather to engage in "casuistry", dealing in the light of its spiritual vision with concrete social questions as they arise. Such questions might range from

comparatively simple questions like the payment of taxes to such grave questions as murder under governmental orders in war; it extends to a recognition of trade-unions because they express human initiative in self-government, and to the rejection of Fascist corporations because they violate this initiative.

Naturally there will still arise conflicts between the Church and civil authority over specific cases. But the Church has failed, Voegelin argues, because its lack of common sense has needlessly embroiled it in a *general* conflict with civilizational forces.<sup>17</sup> Thus, its early opposition to the nation state and the money economy put it decisively at odds with secular governments; later, it failed to adjust in time to the advancement of critical science, so making the de-Christianization of large sectors of society inevitable; and (especially relevant for our purpose) it "failed to grasp intellectually the problem of industrialized society and the position of the worker in it".

Symptomatic of this third factor is the failure of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* ("in many respects a laudable document") to understand the Marxian demand for the abolition of property. The Church's "rural hangover",

and its fear of Marxism, blinded it to Marx's crucial distinction between personal property and ownership of the instruments of industrial production. As Voegelin adds sardonically in a phrase that almost summarizes his view of practical politics, "History does not wait for those who do not catch on". Because of its intellectual failure, the Church was gradually reduced "to the rank of a private organization", with the consequence that the public realm was deprived of a vitally necessary representation for the life of the spirit.<sup>18</sup> Casuistry, it is clear, is a demanding discipline, which requires the combination of a profound spiritual vision and an eminent degree of intellectual openness and flexibility.

Voegelin's positive political recommendations tend to be negatives in disguise, prophylactics against delusion or false generalization. It was once put to him that acting purposefully requires some sense of the future order towards which one aims: "Isn't it, therefore, desirable that there should be something like ideological commitment - but tentative and open to criticism and open to change?" (Conv: 33). Voegelin replied that he did not think such commitment feasible in practice. Instead, he recommended a kind of secular equivalent to the casuistry he thinks proper to the Church (*Ibid*: 33-35):

One of the rules would be: concrete cases - because the concrete cases usually explode the lovely cliché jargon which we all use inadvertently. Concretely, a government that has a good tradition in operating politically (say, the British Foreign Office) knows that on the pragmatic level one can plan for ten years, and never more than that.

He illustrates his maxim, "Know your business within the ten years" by citing a few cases where such competence was lacking. Enormous war reparations were levied on Germany, even though "every economist knew" that they were senseless; even if they were paid, they would ruin the economies of the receptors. Again, Roosevelt refused to be persuaded by Churchill that one ought not to

surrender to the Soviet Union so many European capital cities. Thirdly, Voegelin himself was trapped in Austria in 1938 because he had wrongly thought it impossible that the allied governments would so incompetent as to permit Hitler to occupy Austria. In each case common sense would have made it clear what was to be done. Such blunders derive either from ideologies (which "obfuscate the structure of reality") or from political passions which blind the judgment.<sup>19</sup>

Voegelin, therefore, consistently sought to prevent flight from the concrete. In a letter of 1953 to Alfred Schutz (given in Opitz & Sebba, 1981: 458-62), he agrees with Schutz that "historically every position has its counter-positions". "Historically every truth sets itself off against an already existing belief, which the new truth forces into the position of being untrue".<sup>20</sup> But he adds an important corollary:

Everything ultimately depends on what one's position concretely entails. So, methodologically speaking, the generalization is carried too far if it makes the problems of concrete historical position disappear. Formally Socrates is in conflict with Athens; you can set up either side as the position and then call the other side the counter-position. But this, it seems to me, leads to historical relativism. A case like this calls for a decision: Socrates is right, Athens is wrong. (Or the modern liberals' decision: democracy is right, Socrates was a Fascist.) (*Ibid*: 461)

"Theory" can be distinguished from ideology or "civil theology" precisely by its openness to the whole of concrete reality, both spiritual and pragmatic, but also by its refusal to collapse one order into the other.

#### *Political Analysis: An Example*

To illustrate Voegelin's conception of concrete and non-ideological political analysis, I shall summarize the argument of his essay of 1941, "Some Problems of German Hegemony".

German hegemony, he begins, has by 1941 been successfully established over "the larger part of non-Russian Europe", though the legal forms vary from incorporation, as in the case of Austria, to the "alliance of formally equal partners" as in the case of Italy. (In his very first paragraph, then, Voegelin characteristically implies that formal political structures are an unsafe guide to deeper political reality.) He refuses to predict the outcome of the war, and therefore the future stability of German hegemony: "All that a scholar can responsibly do" in 1941 is to identify some of the factors which will affect any future settlement, whatever the outcome of the armed struggle (1941b: 154).

He points out how inadequate it is to think in terms of a static pattern in which political units relate to each other as ready-formed national states. One must think in terms of process. The great Western imperial drive had its core in the Austro-Hungarian empire. After the "seventeenth century catastrophe" this core became marginal to the conflicts (European or colonial) which attended the expansionist drives of the other imperial powers; Spain, France, Holland and England. But then came a central European revival, as Prussia (with its economic unification, industrialization, and rapid population increase) suddenly developed into the most powerful of the continental states.

Squeezed as it was into such a limited territory, Prussia embarked on a programme of expansion almost as soon as it was founded. Its attempt to become a naval power with a "motley colonial empire" (thus challenging the supremacy of Britain) gave way after 1914 to an attempt to expand overland, expressed both in intensified relationships with Italy and Spain to the South and in the National Socialist policy of the drive to the East, the *Drang nach Osten* (*Ibid*: 156).



Germany's central position in Europe entailed either suffocation by the older imperial powers (if it remained passive), or an expansionism which would inevitably threaten those powers: leaving France, for instance, as "a third-rate power on the brink of Europe". A European settlement would have to be either a compromise which would alter the relative power of the Western empires, or the decisive defeat of one or other power. Even after the First World War had led to the dissolution of the Austrian empire, the problem was only shelved. For the arrangement which established a number of minor nation states in Central Europe also created a power vacuum which could survive only as long as Germany was too weak to resume its power-drive in central Europe.

Such factors, Voegelin concludes, would operate whatever the character of the German Government itself. "A Western nation-state with the material momentum of a great power", such as Prussia, cannot be expected to behave as if it were "a minor political unit like Norway" (*Ibid*: 156-58).<sup>21</sup>

Voegelin then turns to the difference made by the National Socialist revolution in Germany. He suggests that Western statesmen scarcely understood how deeply rooted was this revolution in the "peculiar German socio-political structure" (*Ibid*: 161). The German national state was founded only in 1870, and possessed neither a stable ruling class nor "a people which had acquired its democratic liberties in a struggle with the ruling class on a nation-wide scale". Whereas the liberal and democratic movements in Britain and France, rooted in a religious or philosophical understanding, embodied a universalist conception of human dignity, the political formation of the "German masses" was mainly affected by such 19th century ideologies as Marxism and nationalism, which reinforce tendencies to "closure".

In these circumstances "a thorough democratization would have been a difficult task requiring several generations" (*Ibid*: 162). Unfortunately, though,

such possibilities as there were for a democratic development have received a severe setback . . . . through the ill-considered introduction of formal democracy and the consequent rise of National Socialism (*Ibid*: 163).

Voegelin explains. Had the standards of personal conduct associated with the Prussian court been maintained, a man such as Hitler could never have risen to power. Further, the abolition of the German army ironically led, through the loss of the ethos of military professionalism, to the "particularly repulsive atrocities" of the Nazis. And the democratic constitution itself fostered the totalitarian takeover, since the Communists and Nazis, by the use of their "blocking majority" in the Reichstag, were able to make the constitution unworkable.<sup>22</sup>

The final, decisive element is the radical aspiration of the National Socialists to recast the entire civilizational tradition of Germany. All key personnel, all bodies which might influence public opinion, all academic institutions, must share and propagate the new spirit. It is this radical ideological spirit which precipitates the catastrophe.

Voegelin, as I have said, is not willing to predict the war's outcome, or to speculate beyond the war's end. If Germany is to win, "no one will care what we think about it". If Germany is defeated,

in order to prevent a Russian expansion it [will] be necessary for the sea powers to occupy the continent and to organize the indescribable wreck themselves. Any conjecture as to this order is futile, if for no other reason than that we do not know what will be left to be organized (*Ibid*: 168).

He does risk saying that he cannot, in 1941, envisage a stalemate. Neither side will cease fighting as long as

they retain sufficient striking power to retain any hope of ultimate victory.

Voegelin makes one other significant point. Hegemony exacts a penalty also on its possessors. The superimposition on smaller states of German officials, German courts and German secret police, and the German economic exploitation of its vassal states, ensures subsequent chaos whatever the War's outcome: eventual revolution and bloody suppression following a German Victory, or the massacre of Germans and their sympathizers after a German defeat. Any project of "world-empire" is futile because the organizational shell of empire must be devoid of spiritual substance (QH IV: 117). In other words, conquered peoples with a sense of their own heritage will continuously strain against their subject status, so that the cohesion of both the conquered and their conquerors must be undermined. As a Polish officer is said to have remarked of the German attack on his country, "The fly has invaded the flypaper".<sup>23</sup>

The cool tone of this essay does not disguise Voegelin's passionate opposition to the Nazis. But its force derives strictly from the incisiveness of the analysis itself. This combines a powerful general theory of imperialism and its inevitable nemesis (which itself fits logically within Voegelin's overall theoretical framework) with a steady concentration on the specific historical factors operative in the case of Germany. A partisan approach would scarcely yield such a combination. Its lucidity is the more notable given that it was composed in the heat of world war.

However, the essay throws into question some of Voegelin's other stances. Earlier in this chapter, I recorded his astonishment that Hitler was allowed to annexe Austria. His accusation of incompetence, of course, is directed at the allied governments, not at his

own mistaken assessment. But one might think a thorough realism would have led him to anticipate such blunders, since, on his own account, Britain had itself been formed by the imperial mentality. Much more importantly, he never subsequently applied his analysis of hegemony to the policies of the United States itself. We have seen that he dismissed out of hand any criticism of the war in Vietnam. In the light of his criticism of Thucydides for failing to subordinate the "order of necessity" to the "order of morality", the domination exercised by the United States over, say, Central America, ought to raise questions for Voegelin that he seems to have been unwilling to consider.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Responsibility as a Critical Perspective*

As well as the crisp political analysis it makes possible, Voegelin's work can sharpen one's awareness of the pitfalls of a kind of rhetoric which is characteristic of political theology, that of the "transformation of unjust structures".<sup>25</sup>

To illustrate this suggestion I shall consider the work of Holland and Henriot (1983: 31-45), which has been especially influential in Roman Catholic Circles. They discuss three interpretative models of the dynamics of change in society, and the governing metaphors of each model. In a "traditional" model of society, it is imagined that the present social order incorporates such limited good as one may reasonably expect from the world. Change, therefore, primarily implies decay. A strenuous search for reform will merely put at risk the existing good. Challenges to the existing order are to be absorbed, or minimized, or rejected outright. Secondly, society is envisaged as an organic whole, and like the body, its members' proper functioning is determined centrally: the "body" has a "head".<sup>26</sup>

In a "liberal" society change is welcome because it connotes progress or evolution. Society tends to be represented not as an organism, but as a mechanism which can be made to work efficiently. Society is pluralistic, so that the "common good" cannot be the direct object of social concern, but results spontaneously from (or perhaps even *consists of*) the spontaneous balancing of the different interests of individual rational actors. Conflict (envisaged rather superficially as competition) needs to be *managed* rather than arbitrated. No one, of course, speaks of "managing" a war or a revolution, and liberalism is typically nonplussed by convictions or social purposes which are too vigorous to be "managed".

According to the "radical" model of change, society is marked by interdependence, and by fluid patterns of participation which cannot be hierarchically ordered. With such fluidity and indeterminacy, there naturally arises the possibility of conflict. To espouse the radical model is to recognize that such conflict can be creative, just as a personal dialogue can enrich its participants even when they continue to disagree.<sup>27</sup>

In the radical model, suggest Holland and Henriot, the dominant image is that of the work of art or artistic creation: "as a work of art, society is constructed out of its members' dreams, myths and visions". When faced with conflict in society, the radical response is to seek creative paths that lead to new and better forms of society - through fundamental structural transformation (*Ibid*: 39). The artistic image signifies that *society itself* (and not merely the systems which occur within it) is "constructed" by the participation of its members, and society itself is "transformed" by the creative search of those who are willing to face conflict.

In the radical model, basic transformations occur in the very social structures, as the events of history bring about fundamentally new stages. There is a time linkage between past, present, and future, but

it is a dialectical linkage whereby one stage emerges from another through a process of creative conflict (*Ibid*: 38).

To speak of "fundamentally new stages" is to suppose that change goes far deeper than the re-ordering of institutions. To speak of a dialectical process is to posit change as intelligible and patterned. To speak of "creative paths" and "creative conflict" is to suppose that the changes are thoroughly intended, though not necessarily predictable in detail. Thus, Holland and Henriot remark, "It may be that we do not have any historical precedents for the transformation of advanced industrial capitalist societies. Hence our task is not to copy other models, but to unleash our creative imagination" (*Ibid*: 40).<sup>28</sup>

An example clarifies what Holland and Henriot propose. Granted a situation of international economic injustice, "a traditionalist response would strengthen the police and military instruments to repress protesting social movements". Some affluent people may practise philanthropy, making certain benefactions while reserving all power to themselves; but the international system will be regarded as inviolable. "A liberal model guides an *accommodationist* response", so that certain adjustments will be effected. Aid programmes may be implemented, the repayment of debts deferred. But "a radical model guides a *structuralist* response":

No amount of "tinkering" with the current global order will remedy the situation. The rich/poor relationships need to be transformed through creative efforts to restructure the global social system. The call for a "New International Economic Order" is an instance of the structuralist response, though a more thorough response requires new national social orders as well (*Ibid*: 41-42).

This illustration threatens to discredit the entire argument. The "structuralist response" reads as a grandiose fantasy in which omniscience by radicals

conveniently meets with their opponents' acquiescence. Even if one agrees that the present economic order is systematically biased against less industrialized countries, so that only a radical *analysis* suffices, so comprehensive a "policy" abandons any notion of practicability.

Our criticism is not that "global" radicalism is mistaken about the need for change, or even that it is unduly sanguine about the possibilities of change, but that it expresses far too restricted a sense of how social change occurs. Radicalism of this kind imagines change to be brought about by the strenuous effort, the refusal to compromise, of the radicals themselves. Conversely, it does not envisage change as emerging gratuitously from the social milieu (that is, as a function of what Moltmann calls *avenir*, as opposed to *futur*), or as occurring gradually, in harmony with cultural and spiritual growth. Voegelin would hold that any such instant change must be superficial, and that institutional adjustments which are not rooted in the culture are futile.<sup>29</sup> It is, therefore, erroneous to suppose that a "radical response" necessarily follows from a radical analysis. Holland and Henriot are less careful than the mature Marx who, as we saw in Chapter Nine, came to disavow immediate radical activism without attenuating the force of his analysis.<sup>30</sup>

A second criticism is that Holland and Henriot's notion of "radicalism" lacks the critical penetration of their accounts of traditionalism and liberalism. In particular, their image of the conflict inherent in the radical model is no less sanitized than the one they attribute to liberalism. The "fundamental transformation" effected by the common participation of opposed groups might, far from constructing a harmonious work of art, rip the canvas apart. Our consideration of language is relevant here. When used over against the labels

"liberalism" and "conservatism", "radicalism" conveys the impression of rigour. It is a misnomer when applied to the euphoric expectation that the institutional order can be overturned in its entirety: in fact, its use might well nurture that very illusion.<sup>31</sup>

Holland and Henriot are, in fact, able to offer one convincing example of a change which may be called radical (in that dominant assumptions and institutions are fundamentally and effectively challenged), and yet is actually operative. This is the growth of ecclesial *comunidades de base*, (1983: 44). However I should wish to argue that these communities are not radical in the precise sense meant by Holland and Henriot. They do not arise from some prior analysis of the defects of dominant ecclesial structures, and are not designed as a self-conscious alternative to those structures. On the contrary, they have emerged as expressions of the spirituality of certain communities (who, not by coincidence, were socially marginal). Their radicalism has gradually become manifest, without its being deliberately sought.

One misunderstanding must be averted. The radical response derives much of its plausibility from the rightful awareness that the weight of suffering caused by political and economic injustice demands *urgent* action. Voegelin's position must not be taken to imply that all one can do is await those cultural changes (taking place over generations) which will somehow dissolve concrete ills. It will suffice to quote from his important essay of 1981, "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme", in which he refers to the Hesiod's enumeration of the miseries of human life:

As long as our existence is undeformed by fantasies, these miseries are not experienced as senseless. We understand them as the lot of man, mysterious it is true, but as the lot he has to cope with in the organization and conduct of his life, in the fight for survival, the protection of his dependents, and the resistance to injustice, and in his spiritual



and intellectual response to the mystery of existence (1981: 237-38).

One is obliged, in other words, to struggle against perceived injustice.

Further, as was seen in Chapter Seven, Voegelin readily grants that political institutions can, indeed, be reorganized. So specific "radical" policies might in principle be appropriate at any time. But to the extent that global radicalism only serves to discredit the pursuit of limited and attainable aims it ought itself to excite the "suspicion" advocated by Segundo.

It is time to consider what has been illustrated by our recourse to the work of Holland and Henriot. We have seen how Voegelin is committed to a politics of "responsibility". This entails firstly the repudiation of ideologies, and secondly the attempt to practise a "casuistry" of discernment, guided above all by the circumstances of the concrete case. Such casuistry is not anti-theoretical. A pragmatism which disdains theory seems incoherent: one cannot renounce theory and simply judge individual cases on their merits, because one needs a theory as to what constitutes a merit. Voegelin's theoretical framework has been characterized at length: about the nature of the metaxy, about the primacy of consciousness over institutions, and about the nature of the intellectual life as a search for truth - impelled by living questions, and derailed by the acceptance of formulaic solutions.

He repudiates ideologies (liberalism, conservatism and Marxism alike) because each depends for its plausibility on a theory which falsifies reality, either by positive untruth or by the systematic exclusion from attention of whole dimensions of reality itself. All are escapes from discernment, especially because each of them closes itself off from self-questioning. Therefore, none of

them can offer a safe guide for political decision-making. As Saul Bellow has remarked (in an interview printed in the *Independent* newspaper, 10/2/1990), "Systems fall away one by one, and you tick them off as you pass by". In the case of Holland and Henriot, Voegelin would endorse their rejection of the conservative and liberal models. He shares some ground with their radical analysis, but would refuse the "radical response" at the precise point where it also becomes an ideology by its claim to global validity and by its espousal of a goal of total transformation.

For Voegelin, as for Holland and Henriot, existing social systems, no matter how formidable and entrenched, are never more than provisional crystallizations of social practice. But this implies what they do not admit: that there can be no *a priori* principle which determines how far they ought to be preserved, and how far renegotiated.<sup>92</sup>

### Voegelin's Conception of Political Maturity

#### *The Social Location of Maturity*

If one renounces ideologies and *a priori* prescriptions for action and at the same time maintains that the reform of external institutions is necessary but secondary, one enthrones instead the principle of continuous political discernment. Not surprisingly, therefore, at many points in this study we have been brought back to the decisive importance Voegelin attaches to the concept of maturity (that is, the capacity to discern aright), in the people as a whole and especially in ruling groups. He insists that "the true alternative" to those two false ones is "the restoration of spiritual substance in the ruling groups of a society, with the consequent restoration of the moral strength in creating a just social order" (ER: 180): and he insists on it despite his admission that the

pragmatic value of this "true alternative" is not very high either.

If his political theory is to command assent, he must naturally explain satisfactorily what constitutes this "spiritual substance", and how it bears on political life. Indeed, any political theory is obliged to explicate its conception of good leadership, formal and informal. In turn, any account of political leadership embodies, at least tacitly, some vision of how social change occurs.

According to the *Nichomachean Ethics*, it is clear that people desire different things as goods. Therefore, either all goods are only relative, or there actually is some authentic good but most people's desires are deluded. Pleasure, for example, "appears to [most people] to be a good, although it is not". Aristotle defines the person of good character (or, as Voegelin would say, of spiritual substance), in such a way as to resolve this problematic:

The man of good character judges every situation rightly; i.e. in every situation what appears to him is the truth . . . . he is a sort of standard and yardstick of what is fine and pleasant (Aristotle, 1976: 121-22 in section 1,113).

The Greek word translated here as "the man of good character" is *spoudaios*. Voegelin thinks the term better translated as "the serious, or weighty man", the one who has attained full human stature (OH III: 300). He comments, "These reflections of Aristotle are perhaps the most important contribution to an epistemology of ethics and politics that has ever been made".<sup>33</sup>

Ethics, including political ethics, is a "science of mature people, by mature people, for mature people", and not either "a vain opining without verification" or "an intuition of 'values' in the abstract". Ethics arises only as the self-interpretation of a civilized society;

"or more precisely, in that stratum of a civilized society in which the excellences are cultivated and debated" (*Ibid*: 301). The *spoudaios* is the criterion for ethics, and not *vice versa* (*An-E*: 65).<sup>34</sup>

Now Voegelin is speaking here of the science of ethics, not ethical practice. It is therefore important for him to make clear that *maturity itself* does not require the taste for debate: for works of *pneuma*, as opposed (conceivably) to works of intellect, have no natural home in the leisured classes.

He offers one resource for this necessary clarification in his account of the Aristotelian virtue of *phronesis*. *Phronesis* is the insight or the capacity which allows one to resolve existentially the metaxic tension (which can never be dissolved theoretically) between "a justice which is everywhere the same and yet, in its realization, changeable and everywhere different" (*An-E*: 61-62). *Phronesis* is not one virtue among others, but is the source of the specifically ethical virtues. As Voegelin elsewhere explains, "Justice as an ethical virtue is outranked by the dianoetic virtues, and especially by *phronesis*", just as the Christian "cardinal" virtues are outranked by the "theological" virtues, which allow the soul to be decisively formed by its transcendental orientation, so that it is capable of practising the ethical virtues (*OH III*: 111).<sup>35</sup>

Now Aristotle "attributes to concrete action a higher degree of truth than to general principles of ethics" (*Ibid*: 62). This does not mean that the philosopher's role is superfluous, because correct action normally requires deliberation, "and the premise for rational deliberation is ethical knowledge" (*Ibid*: 63). But Aristotle also allows for the possibility that the *eutyches* (those "favoured by fortune") can attain truth

without the mediation of "ethical knowledge" (*Ibid*: 63-64). It follows that those who practise *phronesis* may be different people than Voegelin habitually envisages, and may be far more numerous.<sup>36</sup>

Now political theology takes this possibility to be a practical certainty, and takes it as seriously as possible. Rebecca Chopp quotes a saying of Gutiérrez, "Even the poor have a right to think" (1989: 187): that is, they can become reflectively aware of their experience in such a way that insight is nourished, rather than prejudice entrenched. To put this in Voegelinian terms, the Christian insistence that *pneuma* is offered to all is a differentiated equivalent of the claim that *phronesis* is possessed by other than philosophers.

But Voegelin himself takes no such step. Perhaps it is implicit in Aristotle's term *eutyches* that such people are exceptional charismatic figures whose presence cannot readily be predicted or identified; and therefore, that they cannot be nominated as leaders. Be that as it may, Voegelin's own definition of *phronesis*, "the virtue of correct action and, at the same time, the virtue of right speech about action" (*AN-E*: 65), has articulacy built into it. From his statement that ethics is a science for the mature, Voegelin infers that the "prudential science" of politics belongs to a limited and recognizable group:

When the predominance of such a group is endangered by the masses whose passions (*pathos*) are not restrained by reason (*logos*), then the quality of the society will decline. . . . The validity of its [political science's] insights is not in question; but the validity will be socially accepted only under certain historical conditions (*QH III*: 302).<sup>37</sup>

He ought, surely, to say, that what endangers society is less the denial of the science of ethics or of "the prudential science of politics" than the absence of *phronesis* or maturity itself. By omitting to make this distinction, he does indeed imply that society depends on

those who have the leisure to cultivate and debate the science of ethics: *noesis* supplants *pneuma* as the decisive political good.

The dynamics of the just political society as Voegelin conceives it are clear: certain people, formed by their openness to the transcendent, become the authoritative source of political order. It is these few who maintain any civilization, and if they are scattered or impotent, social breakdown soon follows, for where their authority cannot be made effective the political order is already corrupt. Their gifts impose on them a corresponding obligation. According to the "Parable of the Cave" in the *Republic*, those philosophers who have been enlightened are to return to the Cave to share their gift, for the happiness of the individual is subordinate to the happiness of the whole polis (OH III: 116).

#### *The Philosophers' Split with the Polis*

Voegelin's argument now takes a decisive step:

But why is this duty incumbent on them? Why should the philosopher sacrifice himself to co-citizens who would rather kill him than follow him? The question of apolitism becomes acute (OH III: 116).

The reason why "the question of apolitism becomes acute" for Plato is that, in the Dialogues which follow the *Republic*, he envisages a split between a spiritual community of philosophers and the temporal community of the polis as a whole. In the event that true philosophers should come to power in a polis, Socrates suggests in the *Republic*,

the whole population over ten years of age should be sent out of the polis to the countryside. Then the philosophers should take over the children under ten years of age and raise them after their own manner . . . . This would be the surest and quickest way to establish the politeia among a people. The programme is ingenious and eminently practical . . . . [but] has only one flaw: it cannot be executed by

true philosophers. For any attempt to realize the order of the idea by violent means would defeat itself. The authority of the spirit is an authority only if, and when, it is accepted in freedom (*Ibid*: 135).

By pointing to such a "flaw" Voegelin perhaps acquits himself of any charge that he advocates sheer authoritarianism.<sup>38</sup> But his argument at this crucial point is perverse. He denies that the passage represents "a Platonic programme for political action": "the Socrates-Plato of the dialogue evokes the idea of the right order; those who have ears may listen." The passage has "no other function" than to show that, given the people's consent, the idea is technically feasible.

If the proposal is so modestly intended, however, its sequel becomes unintelligible. "The appeal went unheard, as might have been expected."

The lack of response had important consequences for Plato's future life and work, for he washed his hands of Athenian politics definitely. It meant the end of the philosopher-king who would realize the idea in Athens or anywhere else (*Ibid*: 136).

Accordingly, the *Phaedrus* becomes "the manifesto which announces the emigration of the spirit from the polis" (*Ibid*: 139). Athenian society is split into "an unrepresentative public order and an unrepresented spiritual substance" (*Ibid*: 140).

Voegelin's conclusion is striking: the societal split engenders a tension of such sharpness that the common bond of humanity between the lost souls and the manic souls is almost broken. The difference between the souls tends to become a generic difference between a lower type of human beings, close to animals, and a higher type of semi-divine rank. This divinization, which seems absurd in the realm of Christian experience, is inherent in the logic of the myth of nature. . . . The obstacle to such recognition which in the Christian orbit stems from the experience of creaturely equality before a transcendent God, does not exist in the Platonic experience (*Ibid*: 141).

This argument is at the heart of Voegelin's political theory. Three criticisms will be made of it.

Firstly, in admitting that the proposal fails to measure up to the Christian insight of human equality before God, Voegelin exculpates Plato much too lightly. The virtual dissolution of "the common bond of humanity" is not only "unchristian" (that is, open to criticism retrospectively, from the perspective of a more differentiated awareness of truth); it is grossly "unmetaxic". One would expect Voegelin to recognize this, for he adds a footnote which begins "Today we live in a situation similar to Plato's", and quotes approvingly a reflection of Karl Jaspers on the "conflict of mass and nobility". Jaspers writes, "The seriousness of the problem of how we can take care of the mass-man - who is not willing to stand in inner independence - leads to *the revolt of existential plebianism in every one of us* against the duty of being ourselves which God in His inscrutability has imposed on us" (emphasis added). So, Jaspers observes, an activist elite can easily turn into "a minority with all the characteristics of a new, and not at all aristocratic, mass" (quoted OH III: 143-44). Despite quoting this passage, however, Voegelin palpably does not believe in any tinge of "existential plebianism" in "Plato-Socrates".<sup>39</sup>

Secondly: if the rejection of the philosopher's proposal is sufficient to demonstrate the Athenians' incorrigibility, then the proposal itself is obliged to be not merely technically practicable, but also rationally uncontestable. Such status is argued for neither in Plato's Dialogue nor in Voegelin's text.

Thirdly: one cannot infer from the people's rejection of the proposal that "the spirit has emigrated from the polis". If the philosophers are the only educators who



can with sureness establish the *politeia*, the very acceptance of the proposal would only ratify the fact that the spirit has *already* "emigrated" to them. For the issue does not rest on the rational merits of the proposal (which could be debated) but on the implicit claim by Plato-Socrates that the philosophers be given allegiance. Further, the philosophers' refusal to coerce, though commended by Voegelin, is of little significance if the people's use of the freedom allowed to them provokes the philosophers to renounce the polis: more precisely, the demand for absolute authority to be vested in them is itself a form of coercion when it is accompanied, as in this case, by such a threat. It seems, as it is remarked in Max Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dobson*, that "the Socratic manner is not a game at which two can play".

The theme of the wise ruler's absolute pre-eminence persists into the next dialogue, the *Statesman*. This dialogue, notes Voegelin, has a subtler psychology than the *Republic*: different people exemplify different virtues, which may even operate against each other, so "the virtues in themselves, without orientation and discipline, will not amalgamate into a stable order". (Hence, of course, the significance of the *phronesis* that underlies the particular virtues.) The royal ruler (one of the "very few men" who possess the *logos basilikos*) is to weave these strands into a "supple fabric", eliminating some by death and exile, relegating others to slavery: he is "the mediator between the divine reality of the Idea and the people" (OH III: 160, 166-69). As such, it is clear, he must transcend the limits of metaxic existence and elude the limits set to his or anyone's virtue by Plato's "subtler psychology".

We cannot here follow the theme of the "royal ruler" (i.e. the *spoudaios* who is accorded social predominance) through the subsequent Platonic writings. But we must

note Voegelin's deep ambivalence as to whether such a figure is historically conceivable. He knows that "existential plebianism" afflicts all of us, that the categories of "mass" and "minority" are fluid:

The reality of history does not have the structure of the model politeia in which the ruler possesses the *logos basilikos*. Nevertheless, reality is intelligibly related to the model, even though its mode should be one of derivation, or of a falling off (*Ibid*: 162).

But despite this knowledge, he applies the symbol of the royal ruler to Plato himself, in two different ways.

He writes, firstly, that Plato's development culminates in the *Laws*, at which point "Plato has accepted the distance which separates him from other men; he now speaks as the divine lawgiver to men who are equal because they are equidistant from him". To be sure, Plato presupposes the "myth of nature", which posits "a hierarchically differentiated psyche, with gradual transitions from humanity to divinity" (*OH III*: 234); so Voegelin can acknowledge the "theocratic limitations" of Plato (*Ibid*: 265) without inconsistency: but the objection we have levelled against this construction in the *Phaedrus* applies equally here. By writing that Plato has "accepted" the distance between himself and all others, Voegelin acquiesces in Plato's self-assessment. One would think, though, that to place oneself at the absolute apex of any such natural hierarchy suggests a *hubris* close to madness, rather than the "culmination" of a philosopher's development.

This impression is reinforced when Voegelin discusses Aristotle's perception of Plato. Plato inaugurates

a new spiritual aeon of the world. Plato's judgment on his age is confirmed, but his work is not invalidated by his failure to link spirit with power in pragmatic politics. . . . The polis may decline, sink to insignificance and disappear, but the world will go on in a movement of which the meaning is determined by Plato (*Ibid*: 284).

Plato the prophet becomes Plato the proclaimed. On this occasion, admittedly, Voegelin implicitly criticizes Aristotle's serene acceptance of the decline of the polis and his readiness to transfer all hope from political to contemplative life, by contrasting it with Plato's own reluctance to dissociate spirit and power (*Ibid*: 288-89). As we have seen, though, Plato's "reluctance" did not amount to a refusal, and Voegelin has commended "Plato-Socrates" for "washing his hands" of the Athenian polis.

### *Maturity and Integrity*

"Plato-Socrates", then, retires from direct political involvement because the people will not follow him, and he is not willing to remain in political life on any other terms than that. Now Voegelin elsewhere tries to guard himself against the obvious accusation that he makes the retention of personal integrity absolutely prior to civic commitment. Writing of Mikhail Bakunin, he states that "the life of mankind in historical existence is not a life of sweet reason and sensible adjustment", but embodies the mystery of evil:

the mystery that evil sometimes can be remedied only by opposing evil; that destructive outbreak of evil supplies the force for breaking an unjust order and substituting an order of superior justice (*ER*: 232).

Even in the case of the "storm of revolution, with its horrors and moral confusion", therefore,

the man who assumes consciously the responsibility for releasing the storm is perhaps moved deeper by the sense of justice than the man who resists it because he wishes to preserve the values of the existing order; and even the rascal who uses the upheaval for his personal profit . . . . may have a positive function in the establishment of the new order which is denied to the man who has to stand aside because he cannot sacrifice his integrity (*Ibid*: 233).

Voegelin does not, however, allow this deeply felt comment to modify as it ought his notion of the *spoudaios*

itself, as may be seen in his important critique of the *Utopia* of Thomas More.

The core of this critique is stated in *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*. According to the *Utopia*, the perfect society is one without private property: however,

More is well aware that this perfect state cannot be achieved in the world: Man's lust for possessions is deeply rooted in original sin, in *superbia* in the Augustinian sense. . . . This raises the question of the peculiar psychopathological condition in which a man like More must have found himself when he drew up a model of the perfect society in history, in full consciousness that it could never be realized because of original sin (SPG: 101).

Voegelin argues in this way despite having acknowledged, in his extended essay of 1951, "More's Utopia", that the name of the reporter of Utopian life, Hythlodæus, means "teller of idle tales", so that it is by no means clear what More himself thought of the value of the Utopian institutions. The "ideal" society is a literary device, designed to serve as an instrument of social critique (1951: 452, 454, 459). Nevertheless, according to Voegelin, once More had diagnosed the evils of his time as a "rampage of *superbia*", he ought to have prescribed "the Christian answer" of restored spiritual order. But because of "the far-reaching decomposition of his Christianity" More could no longer experience the spiritual order as "a representative public order in the commonwealth" (*Ibid*: 458). Instead he playfully posited a society in which the evil of *superbia* is removed by institutions:

More himself still had enough substance to know that such stuff can lead only to Nowhere. Nevertheless he indulged in the play; and the results of the play do not differ from the results at which the thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries arrived when the spiritual weakness of More had degenerated into spiritual impotence. . . . The spiritual order is replaced by the social ideal (*Ibid*: 463).

In other words, even More's *fictional* evocation of a political society without pride manifests loss of spirit,

and offers a precedent for those who will put forward the same panaceas without irony. In *Science Politics and Gnosticism*, Voegelin sums up as follows:

we may speak, then, of the pneumopathological condition of a thinker who, in his revolt against the world as it has been created by God, arbitrarily omits an element of reality in order to create the fantasy of a new world (SPG: 101).

This summary seriously misrepresents the *Utopia*. More does not "revolt against God" (by succumbing to fantasy and proposing the model of some new world in which the primacy of spirit over social arrangements is denied): on the contrary, he identifies such a "new world" precisely as an enlightening fantasy. Because it is the Utopians' lack of *hubris* which makes possible the character of their political institutions, More does not imagine that Utopian institutions can be duplicated in order to transform other societies. It is this very misrepresentation which underpins Voegelin's attack on More, namely that More "drew up a model of the perfect society in history" knowing it to be unrealizable. In transforming More's "playful" fantasy into a "model", Voegelin commits the very aberration of which he accuses More. He overlooks what he knows perfectly well.

Voegelin's attack on More seems to have two motivations. Firstly, he thinks that More's work beat a path which others would later tread more destructively.<sup>40</sup>

The second point bears directly on our theme of the *spoudaios*. "Even under the conditions of the all-embracing Hellenic polis, [Plato] knew that times may come when non-participation is the duty" (1951b: 455). "More", Hythlodæus's interlocutor in the dialogue, on the contrary, defends the philosopher's attempt to mitigate political evil from within the king's council, even if he must thereby settle for "polite philosophy"

rather than that which "says what it thinks regardless of circumstances" (More, 1965: 63).

Voegelin, of course, recognizes that "More" does not necessarily speak for More the author. Nevertheless, he argues, the author, as a Christian, should have been even more aware than Plato that the supreme duty is "the orientation of life towards the *summum bonum*". In the dialogue, *neither party* presents this true alternative, and the dialogue therefore "dodges the spiritual issues":

that all men are not good, and therefore all things cannot be well, is sound admonition to a perfectionist; but it easily can become a cover for condoning crimes. What makes this argument so flat is the renunciation of the spirit as the ultimate authority beyond the temporal order and its insufficiencies (Voegelin, 1951b: 456).

"More", in espousing the perennial excuse of the intellectual "collaborator" (the strong term is Voegelin's) renounces philosophy: Hythlodæus presents the spurious alternative of the fantasy state; and the author is content to conduct the debate within the reductionist terms of reference allowed by secular humanism.

At first sight, this argument appears weighty. Any attempt to check evil by oneself renouncing truth must be futile. The argument epitomizes Voegelin's own admirably demanding conception of philosophy as the *imitatio Socratis*. But the charge relies for its validity on a gratuitous assumption: that if the fulness of philosophical insight is omitted from the dialogue, the author is guilty of reductionism. On the contrary, however, the *Utopia*, and especially its unsparing account of civil, judicial and ecclesiastical corruption in Part I, itself constitutes a refusal to condone evil: and "More"'s advocacy of tact among councillors is far from being an abandonment of truth. Instead, it is precisely an attempt to *communicate* truth effectively, rather than simply to blurt it out:

You wouldn't abandon ship in a storm just because you couldn't control the winds. On the other hand, it's no use attempting to put across entirely new ideas, which will obviously carry no weight with people who are prejudiced against them. You must go to work indirectly (More, 1965: 63-64).<sup>41</sup>

Thus, our second point: despite the remarks we have cited in respect of Bakunin, Voegelin's critique of More presumes that the *only way* to be oriented to the *summum bonum*, of being an authentic *spoudaios*, is to make the "renunciation of politics" of the *Timaeus* (OH III: 180), so retaining one's freedom to utter the fulness of philosophical truth to everyone at all times. In other words, Voegelin treats More on Plato's terms, but Plato on his own terms. Further, Voegelin's critique is valid only if the mitigation of evil does not itself constitute an orientation to the good, and if the good which can only be accomplished by engagement (and which is necessarily forfeited by renouncing politics), counts for nothing. Voegelin ends up by implying that only the absolutist is truly mature.

### Conclusions

Voegelin's conception of political responsibility combines the repudiation of ideologies with the commitment to discernment in specific cases.

It would be wrong to regard this position as a disguised way of evading political responsibility, and it would beg the question to assume without argument that Voegelin is really rejecting all "practical politics". Fortunately, one recent case, that of the Czech writer Vaclav Havel, has illustrated the potential of Voegelin's perspective. Havel's essay "The Power of the Powerless" (1985) does not mention Voegelin explicitly. But one who approaches it with a knowledge of Voegelin will smile at

the recognition of familiar positions expressed with a lucidity particular to Havel.

Havel first asks whether "dissidents" - "a category of subcitizen outside the power system" - can have any influence on Eastern European society (*Ibid*: 23). The "psychic aggregate" (to use Voegelin's term) of that power system is one of a "total ideology". That is, it pervades the whole of the community's life, it can scarcely be accepted only in part, and it "offers a ready answer to any question whatsoever" (*Ibid*: 25). Havel gives a vivid example:

The manager of a fruit and vegetable shop places in his window, among the onions and carrots, the slogan: "Workers of the World, Unite!" Why does he do it? . . . . Is he genuinely enthusiastic about the idea of unity among the workers of the world? Is his enthusiasm so great that he feels an irrep-ressible impulse to acquaint the public with his ideals? Has he really given more than a moment's thought to how such a unification might occur and what it would mean (*Ibid*: 27)?

The real meaning of the sign, Havel suggests, is the greengrocer's "subliminal but very definite message" that the regime can rely on his docility. To have displayed the more accurate sign, "I am afraid and therefore unquestioningly obedient" would have surrendered his dignity too obviously. As it is, he can always defend himself by saying, "What's wrong with the workers of the world uniting?" (*Ibid*: 28). In this way, both the character of his obedience and the nature of the power that imposes it are disguised.

One purpose of Havel's essay is to show that such a total ideology is far more fragile than it appears. A second purpose is to explain that opposition to it will not, at least primarily, be expressed through overt political confrontation, least of all by espousing some competing ideology. The most effective opposition is that of "living within the truth" (*Ibid*: 47, 39). If the



greengrocer removes the sign (the removal itself being a symbolic action) or stops voting in elections he knows to be a farce, he may well be harrassed or attacked. But those who attack him will probably do so not from the conviction of their rightness, but only from the same timid conformism which the greengrocer has refused. For the greengrocer has "shattered the world of appearances". Precisely because the ideology is total, "everyone who steps out of line *denies it in principle and threatens it in its entirety* (*Ibid*; 40).

At this point, one hears echoes of Voegelin:

Individuals can be alienated from themselves only because there is something to alienate. The terrain of this violation is their authentic existence. Living the truth is thus woven directly into the texture of living a lie. . . . Only against this background does living a lie make any sense . . . .

The singular, explosive, incalculable political power of living within the truth resides in the fact that living openly within the truth has an ally, invisible to be sure, but omnipresent: this hidden sphere (*Ibid*: 41).

This sphere of truth (this "second culture" as Havel calls it on page 78) is dangerous from the perspective of power. From the perspective of so-called "practical politics" those who try to live in truth would have to be classed as a negligible "mini-party" (*Ibid*: 44). But one cannot estimate the power of "dissidents" through the lens of the open political system. Havel suggests that Solzhenitsyn was driven from his own country not "because any of the regime's representatives felt he might unseat them and take their place in government", but in an attempt "to plug up the dreadful wellspring of truth" (*Ibid*: 42).

It follows from this analysis that one cannot properly polarize political responsibility and the exercise of personal integrity. According to Havel, and as Voegelin always argued, the profoundest *political* reality is not

that of parties and their programmes, but of a "pre-political" search for truth. The Czech dissidents have concluded that "there is no other way to conduct real politics" in their situation (*Ibid*: 44):

this conclusion can be reached only by someone who is unwilling to sacrifice his or her own human identity to politics, or rather who does not believe in a politics that requires such a sacrifice (*Ibid*).

One final aspect of Havel's essay must be mentioned. Like Voegelin, he refuses to legislate in advance for concrete cases, even at the risk of seeming to exclude himself from the realm of practical, "responsible" political choices. Alluding ironically (one presumes) to Lenin, he asks "What is to be done, then?". He claims (*Ibid*: 92-93) that his "scepticism towards alternative political models and the ability of systemic reforms or changes to redeem us" does not make him sceptical of political thought altogether. But his "existential revolution" aims at "a moral reconstitution of society":

A new experience of being, a renewed rootedness in the universe, a newly grasped sense of "higher responsibility", a new-found inner relationship to other people and to the human community - these factors clearly indicate the direction in which we must go (*Ibid*).

The political consequences of this will "probably" derive from "human factors rather than from a particular formalization of political relationships and guarantees. In other words, the issue is the rehabilitation of values like "trust, openness, responsibility, solidarity, love" (*Ibid*).<sup>42</sup>

At this point, a reader of Voegelin is bound to recall such expressions as "attunement to being", "community of being", "open soul" and "open society". However, Havel does use one word that would disconcert Voegelin, namely "solidarity". And this addition offers a key to our interpretation.

In discussing Voegelin's conception of political responsibility in Chapters Nine and Ten, we have seen that it combines resistance to ideologies (a resistance which entails one's alertness to linguistic corruption and one's own commitment to linguistic probity) with the positive attempt to live in truth, "attuned to reality". The political good can be achieved only where a leadership which itself lives in truth secures adequate support from the wider society. Like Voegelin, Havel finds a starting point in the critique of language, in his case through the attempt to penetrate the consciousness behind a representative political slogan. Like Voegelin, he attaches far greater weight to the attempt to live in truth than to put forward a plausible detailed programme oneself. And the remarkable fate of Havel himself and the movement associated with him (as it seems at the time of writing this chapter) forbids one to write off such an emphasis as unrealistic.

But there are two crucial differences between them. Voegelin says that ethics, "a science of mature people", can arise only in a highly civilized society as its self-interpretation; or, more precisely, in that stratum of a civilized society in which the excellences are cultivated and debated (OH III: 301).

But on Havel's account, *spoudaioi* can threaten the reign of ideology specifically because they, and the virtue of *phronesis* itself, are by no means restricted to such circles. Ideology is effectively threatened not when the philosopher rebels, but when the greengrocer rebels.

Secondly, for Havel as opposed to Voegelin, such *spoudaioi* cannot afford to withdraw from the political scene. People of integrity do not, indeed, enter the political game under its present rules. But they only make themselves felt when they find a way of practising "real politics". The notion of political responsibility, so precious to Voegelin, can be expressed *only* through

the very style of engagement which he deprecates, for example, in the case of Thomas More. Accordingly, there is a kind of maturity and integrity which expresses itself only through accepting political responsibility. It involves the agent in implementing *and discovering* political norms, and then submitting them to continuous rational scrutiny.<sup>43</sup>

Voegelin's conception of the *spoudaios*, therefore, is an enlightening but partial one. There is no virtue in being "detached from causes" as such, except in so far as one is freer to respond to truth. This is not a negligible consideration, granted how partisanship can lead to self-deception. But truth is not something which can be possessed in tranquillity, so that one's existential task is already accomplished by contemplating it. *Spoudaioi* have to risk engagement, because disengagement precludes some of the very experiences on which responsible discernment has to be exercised.

We have, indeed, noted Voegelin's regretful admission that "the man who has to stand aside because he cannot sacrifice his integrity" forfeits the possibility of effectively opposing evil (ER: 233). But the sad consequences of such abstention are a warning that such integrity is not the virtue it seems. It is only purism. In the metaxy, integrity can only exist concretely when it *co-exists* with compassionate engagement. There is a metaxic tension, which Voegelin significantly fails to mention, between the search for truth and the search for justice (where "justice" means *agape* as directed towards groups, or what one might call "political love"). Though he formally acknowledges the validity of the Christian differentiation by which *agape* transcends *noesis* (see Chapter Four), Voegelin does not allow this acknowledgment to affect his conception of the *spoudaios*.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter will not add substantially to the conclusions reached in the body of the study. It will simply make clear what they are, in twelve points.

The Contribution Intended by this Study

1. There have been several expositions of Voegelin's thought. Among the items listed in section II of the bibliography, Sandoz (1981), Sebba (1982), Webb (1981 & 1988) and Cooper (1986) are reliable and readily accessible. Sandoz, in particular, has not only worked persistently to make Voegelin better known, but elicited Voegelin's own *Autobiographical Memoir*. But no one, as far as I know, has made a detailed critique of Voegelin's thought of the kind attempted here. On the one hand, no one who has tried to assimilate Voegelin's work as a whole has written a systematic attack on him. On the other hand, among sympathetic accounts of his work, those of such writers as Sandoz and Sebba virtually restrict themselves to explication and advocacy, rarely venturing any criticism except on marginal points. These men were decisively influenced by Voegelin, and had the benefit of his collaboration. Perhaps they were also daunted by his erudition and his formidable capacity for riposte. Other writers (Nieli, Webb, Morrissey, Germino) do make substantive criticisms, but from a different perspective than that taken in this study.'

In considering Voegelin's attack on Marx, for example, I have received no help from the work of Voegelin scholars. Either they are silent, as if there were no

problem, or they tend simply to endorse his position (see the references to Marx in Sandoz, 1981). For their part, marxian scholars either do not know of Voegelin or choose to ignore him. Nor has anyone drawn attention to the complex blend of affinity and trenchant repudiation which characterizes Voegelin's attitude to the traditionalist wing of American conservatism.

Even more notably, Voegelin's expositors have accepted without serious reservations his treatment of such central symbolic constructs as the *spoudaios* and the *metaxy*, whereas I have criticized him for the narrowness of his conception of the *spoudaios* and for his failure to articulate certain metaxic tensions which, if he were to acknowledge them would bring some of his specific judgments into question.

Naturally, some of the shorter essays cited in the bibliography make criticisms of Voegelin. Anderson (1978: 84-92) questions - in my view, correctly - the adequacy of Voegelin's response to the prophetic literature; and Douglass makes a range of criticisms of Voegelin's treatment of Christianity. My own arguments are informed by theirs without following them. For example, I have argued more strongly than Anderson that Voegelin radically misrepresents the prophetic intention.

2. This study also seeks to make a modest contribution to political theology. In Chapter One we recalled Metz's acknowledgment of the need for a "political theology of the subject" (1980: 60). Voegelin's philosophy of consciousness is an eminent contribution to the meeting of this need, and yet political theologians have so far paid scant attention to it. When one such theologian, Matthew Lamb, does discuss Voegelin, he underestimates the value of his work in an instructive way.<sup>2</sup>

Lamb (1979: 81-87) makes in brief a criticism of Voegelin which has been made in greater detail in this study: namely that he fails to give due weight to transformative action as the end and the primary criterion of Christian faith. He therefore regards political theology's emphasis on "transformative praxis" as at once a corrective and a fulfilment of Voegelin's "disclosive ontology of transcending-experiences" (*Ibid*: 87).

But this judgment is too straightforward. One must add what Lamb fails to state, that political theology's practical emphasis needs, in turn, to be corrected and fulfilled by a theory of consciousness. For if it is asked how anyone *knows* that action is transformative and not merely manipulative (riddled with resentments, self-seeking, power struggles, and so on) one can only refer back to the quality of individual and communal consciousness which is operative in praxis. "Transformative praxis" is not self-validating. It requires an adequate conception of the goal of transformation, namely the character of the good society. Lamb is right to insist that love impels one to praxis: but wrong to neglect the complementary truth that praxis can work for good only when it expresses an *agape* which is critically controlled by *noesis*. Accordingly, he is also wrong to say that Voegelin's work, which admirably explores the implications of this truth, is in principle superseded by political theology. To remain fully rational, political theology needs to be *continuously* challenged from a position such as Voegelin's.

#### Voegelin's Contribution to Political Theology

3. When Voegelin was asked in an interview what he himself considered his "major contribution to human knowledge", his response was characteristically wry:

Well, I have my doubts about the use of the term contribution. It smacks a bit of the progressivist

conception that there is an advance in the history of mankind, and that everybody makes his contribution to it. . . . I doubt very much that my work can be categorized as a kind of contribution to anything (1973b: 135).

What he meant by this is that philosophy has from its origins been conceived as an end in itself, rather than as a "contribution" to some further end. The philosopher's activity of "exploring the structure of reality" needs no extrinsic justification (*Ibid*).

In a different sense, Voegelin is very purposeful: elsewhere he speaks of "recapturing reality in opposition to its contemporary deformation": and reality has to be thus "recaptured" not only from "deformed ideologies", but also from "the deformations of reality by the thinkers who ought to be the preservers of reality, such as the theologians". To this end, the philosopher "has to reconstruct the fundamental categories of existence, experience, consciousness, and reality" (AM: 100). In other words, philosophy is an activity dedicated to the search for noetic order, which is also the resisting of noetic disorder. Since that disorder threatens all human activities, no mode of discourse can dismiss philosophy as irrelevant. To be specific, political theology operates mainly, and legitimately, in the mode of "intentionality", directing its attention outwards with the practical aim of promoting social justice. But this extraverted emphasis can become destructive if it is cut away from the search for existential truth and from contemplative openness to the whole of reality (i.e. the *bios theoretike*). Such a *zetema*, especially when it is also a philosopher's exploration of the nature of social order, has much to offer to political theology.

4. Noetic disorder derives principally from ideologies which deform the structure of reality, and from propositional systems which hypostatize experience and its symbolic articulations.



Accordingly, Voegelin's critical acumen is central to his achievement. He is a masterly analyst both of literary texts (of many different cultures) and of the ways in which societal self-understanding is symbolically expressed, confirmed and modified: we have considered numerous examples of his literary and cultural penetration, both where he wishes to affirm and defend (as in his exposition of Plato, and of certain biblical texts) and where he dissents or challenges (as in the case of Comte and his liberal interpreters, or in the case of the race imagery of National Socialism).

In particular, he gives a satisfying account of how "ideas", or intellectual systems and doctrines (any doctrines, almost regardless of their intrinsic worth) are secondary constructions. They have the valid social function of protecting achieved insights. But where an idea, or system, or doctrine deflects attention from its engendering experience (so that the propositional statement itself becomes a quasi-absolute object of defence or attack) it impedes others from being further nourished by the experience it nominally exists to promote.

While acknowledging the legitimacy of Voegelin's concern in this respect, I have argued that theological doctrines do not, in fact, inherently have the effect or the function he ascribes to them. However, his perspective reaches beyond theology. It also, for example, illuminates what he calls "political ideas", those whose function is not to support the search for truth, but is rather to unify some social group regardless of truth. Political ideas, too, can be valid, in so far as they nourish continued allegiance to a group or a movement. But they often tend to prohibit questioning. Where this happens, a movement will wither from the inside as truth ceases to inhabit it.

5. Despite his own mild disclaimer, therefore, one may say that Voegelin does have a "contribution" to offer to political theology. We may assess this by noting the full implications of his insistence that "man is supposed to be a questioner", not to "rest in an unenquiring state of faith" (1971a: 61). Philosophy itself is not the possessing of wisdom, but the search for it, and faith is not the possessing of revealed truth, but the orientation towards ever-greater truth. The experience of searching and questioning necessarily threatens ideologies (that is, convictions which can survive only as long as they remain unexamined): also, contrary to Voegelin's own assumption, engagement in the search enables one to appreciate theological doctrines rightly. His emphasis on questioning also permits political theory to move beyond "institutional descriptivism" without being in any sense blasé about institutions themselves or the need sometimes to reform them. Finally, and most significantly, it prevents philosophy from degenerating into the handmaid of any power-bloc.<sup>3</sup>

6. This assertion of the primacy of the question must be seen in the context of Voegelin's theory of consciousness. The German version of *Anamnesis* begins as follows:

The problems of human order in society and history originate in the order of consciousness. Hence the philosophy of consciousness is the centre-piece of a philosophy of politics (Voegelin, 1966: 7; translation in Voegelin, 1984a: 35).

It was, he adds, clear to him already in the nineteen-twenties that,

the poor state of political science - through its being mired in neo-Kantian theories of knowledge, value-relating methods, historicism, descriptive institutionalism, and ideological speculations on history - could be overcome only by a new philosophy of consciousness (*Ibid*).

Consciousness is the experience of participation in the community of being (of the individual person,

society, the cosmos and God). Because he conceives consciousness to be constituted both by "intentionality" and by "luminosity", Voegelin can in principle do justice to experiences of creativity and action, and also to those of receptivity, response, grace. By taking this comprehensive notion of experience as his starting point, therefore, he can adopt a thoroughly empirical method, yet without reductionism (that is, without excluding certain areas of reality in order to sustain the plausibility of the system).

Further, his experiential framework illuminates the rational structure of experiences of reality. Symbolic articulations of consciousness do, indeed, have a rational structure. Voegelin speaks of "equivalence": by this, he means that the same structure of experience, of participation in the community of being, is available to all people at all times. But this experience may have various degrees of "compactness" and "differentiation", by which one is more or less aware of one's experience. Similarly it is possible to attain a "reflective distance" from one's very linguistic symbols; one may come to a deeper awareness of how language itself "participates" in reality and is neither identical with it nor separate from it. This analytic framework enables Voegelin to discriminate between the truth-content of different symbolizations, without either hypostatizing the better ones or relegating the worse to the realm of "falsehood".

Questioning itself, therefore, is not an arbitrary act of the autonomous consciousness, but is drawn out of the questioner by an encompassing and transcendent reality to which the questioner's search is a loving response.<sup>4</sup>

Because the search for truth is also a response to reality (which includes both transcendent and societal dimensions), the reality of psyche cannot be separated from the reality of society. It is in this sense that

philosophy is always, in Voegelin's view, a resistance to disorder. We have seen that the paradigm of philosophy for him is the *imitatio Socratis*, and we have recalled the circumstances that forced Voegelin to flee from Austria in 1938. Since society is not a mechanism, but a "psychic aggregate" the personal search for relevant truth is always, in the widest sense, "political": where it is not practised, the polis is already corrupt. Even those who differ from Voegelin on specific matters can be enriched by this vision and this integrity.

7. But this theory of consciousness is set, in turn, in a still wider framework which he takes from Plato, that of the metaxic understanding of human life. It might seem odd that Plato is so central a figure for Voegelin, and he has, indeed, been challenged on the matter. In a revealing passage in one of the "Conversations" in Montreal in 1967, he contrasts "classic philosophy" with ideology, on the ground that the former is built on "common sense" while the latter renounces it. At this point he is asked how he would respond to the charge that he is "culture-bound", proclaiming a single tradition as the only valid one. He replies,

I would not be impressed in the least because the term "culture-bound" is an ideological term which assumes that there are cultures as absolutes. There is no such thing (Conv: 66).

After what reads as a heated exchange, Voegelin denies that he "believes in Plato": that is "a demagogic insinuation that I am an ideologist like everybody else. But I am not". The reason why Plato is foundational for Voegelin is that he has achieved an insight into reality from which one is not permitted to retreat:

We talk in signs about reality. You are free not to talk about existential tension. But if you talk about it, you must talk about it in the language developed by the persons who have discovered existential tension; there is no other (*Ibid*: 69).

Thus, it is because this conception of the metaxy was decisively articulated by Plato that Plato remains the almost ubiquitous touchstone of Voegelin's thought. Plato remains relevant because ideologies (and propositions or systems that implicitly claim an absolute status for themselves), do make this forbidden retreat from Plato's insight."

It is this central symbol of the metaxy, together with the implications Voegelin finds in it, which makes a valuable resource available to political theologians. They do need it: Segundo, after all, even calls Greek philosophy "a museum piece" (1977: 46). The symbol enables Voegelin's rich conception of subjectivity to be rooted not in individualism, but in the fullest possible response to reality.

8. In particular, this metaxic understanding is extended to the social order itself. There is no "society" apart from consciousness, and there is no consciousness which is not engaged in constructing, assimilating and modifying the social order. As we saw in Chapter Five, "justice" is primarily a political symbol, not an ideal of individual persons which has subsequently to be projected outward into society. Order, too, is for Voegelin a dynamic symbol, which commits every person to the struggle against disorder - and, *ex hypothesi*, there is no neat division between noetic and societal disorder. It follows, therefore, that one cannot think one maintains "order" by stabilizing an unjust situation. This unifying of the political, personal and transcendent realms, when combined with such a powerful and subtle conception of what the nature of personal and political reality actually is, is a philosophical achievement which deserves the respect of political theologians.

Voegelin's Failings in the Light of Political Theology

9. Anthony Storr (1988: 85-105) discusses how certain psychologists have developed the Jungian polarity between extraversion and introversion. It seems clear that certain persons are mainly preoccupied with finding or imposing order on their experience, rather than with the pursuit of social intercourse with others (in Storr's phraseology, "patterners" rather than "dramatists", and "convergers" rather than "divergers"). Society will tend to be kept at a distance, by such people, rather than be spontaneously welcomed.

One inevitably sees Voegelin as an eminent example of this type, and his temperament seems to be the very condition of his achievement. He was a formidably dedicated scholar from his youth, and from quite early on was gathering materials for an overview of the history of political ideas. When this seemed to him to be impracticable, he turned to a different overview, of the very structure of human experience in history. He sustained a very few intimate, virtually lifelong, personal relationships (this is true even in his scholarly life, as his continuous "conversation" with Plato demonstrates): but the forming of "community", either as a facet of his personal life or as a form of political action seems scarcely to have engaged him.

Needless to say, such a temperamental leaning is no less valid than its opposite. But Voegelin does not seem to have suspected that his own temperament made him vulnerable to the distortion by which he minimizes the efficacy of everyone's societal formation, for better as well as for worse: or to have imagined that those of a different temperament might find a different kind of fulfilment (i.e. not primarily through the discovery of meaning). In fact, it is gratuitous to assume that meditative introspection is always the *primary* means of

assessing even one's own beliefs. When Socrates sought to elucidate the nature of justice he thought it best to look first at society itself, where things are "writ large" (Plato: 1955: 101).<sup>6</sup>

In arguing as if society is inherently closed to the spirit, so that it threatens the individual's search for existential truth without also forming it, Voegelin neglects an insight well expressed by Lonergan: that human authenticity (which is always a withdrawal from inauthenticity) cannot be attained through a generalized rejection of societal influence:

Just as it is one's own self-transcendence that enables one to know others accurately and to judge them fairly, so inversely it is through knowledge and appreciation of others that we come to know ourselves (Lonergan, 1972: 252-53).

10. I have argued that Voegelin fails where he loses touch with his own best theoretical insights. Thus, his arguments sometimes implicitly posit an opposition, rather than a metaxic tension, between the spiritual and the material and between the historically immanent realm and the realm of the transcendent eschaton. While it is proper to define historical existence by the metaxic experience of struggle against disorder, it is mistaken to locate the experience of "fulfilment" entirely in the eschaton. I have argued in Chapter Eight that Voegelin ought to recognize a metaxic tension *within history* between fulfilment and non-fulfilment: for fulfilment is precisely not absent from history, though it cannot be experienced in some pure state free from metaxic tension. As he banishes hope to the Eschaton, Voegelin wrongly (and, according to his principles, needlessly) disallows hope for the attainment within history - to an indefinite, but never absolute degree - of social justice. In practice, he acknowledges the experience of decline in history while identifying the experience of progress as ideological. Similarly, in

reserving the term "transformation" for the *zoon noetikon* and rejecting its applicability to the *zoon politikon* he splits the psychic and the political realms which he has been at such pains to integrate.

11. Voegelin overvalues philosophers, if not philosophy itself. Plato and Jeremiah are taken as ideal types of the philosopher who constantly opposes ideologues in particular and a recalcitrant society in general. And yet we have seen that this polarity cannot be maintained. Not only is the philosophical consciousness nourished by the very society which is supposedly tainted by folly, but there is *no such concrete person* as a "philosopher" in Voegelin's sense. Jeremiah's psyche is admitted by Voegelin to be itself the site of a conflict between the search for truth and the desire for revenge. Though Voegelin dismisses the relevance of that desire, his dismissal only demonstrates how he dubiously extends the search for truth and meaning to cover the whole scope of the "search" *tout court*: whereas the Christian differentiation implies that the search for truth finds itself in tension with an overriding search for *agape*. Plato's reliance on *peitho* is similarly compromised, both by his allowing of force in the *Laws* and by the withdrawal of "Plato-Socrates" from political life when his appeals go unheard. And Voegelin himself, when he engages in debate with such opponents as Marx, argues for victory not for truth, thereby revealing a distinct tinge of the same ideological consciousness and *libido dominandi* which he condemns. It seems impossible not to attribute to Voegelin, as the shadow side of his particular form of insight, a kind of objective arrogance: that of implicitly placing himself among the one hundred mature persons who, reckons Aristotle, sustain any polis, and that of denying that he is an ideologist "like everybody else".

12. I have argued that Voegelin's conception of "maturity" is seriously defective, even though so much



rests on it. A thinker who, like Thomas More, risks the purity of his truth-telling by engaging in politics is accused of surrendering his spiritual realism, of merely exhibiting the decomposition of his Christian faith. Conversely, Voegelin allows maturity only to those who reluctantly withdraw from political involvement in defence of their intellectual integrity. Their perspective is rendered absolute. It is true that Plato refused "radical withdrawal" from political society: rather, his temporary withdrawal was aimed at reconstruction in the long term. In any given case, this might be a reasonable way of exercising one's personal responsibility for society. But Voegelin is unreasonable to expect those still engaged in the political turmoil to defer to the judgments one makes from such a strategic retirement.

It is only those deemed to be philosophers who are accorded this deference. When the prophets take a similarly uncompromising stance, Voegelin calls it not integrity but intransigence, and accuses them (wrongly, as I have argued in Chapter Six) of practising a metastatic faith which ignores the "order of necessity" which obtains in history.

But the most serious potential effect of Voegelin's narrow conception of maturity is to disable those through whose faithful action society can be formed for good. We have seen him speak of "political or hedonistic action", as if all action could be classed as *divertissement*. One glimpses in Voegelin's work no recognition that the good society depends less on noesis than on hidden and infinitely scattered forces of self-giving, or that the search for such a social order, through *faith-filled* action can express a profound and mature spirituality.<sup>7</sup>

Some words of Reinhold Niebuhr about the character of Christian faith suggest how the notion of maturity can be

enriched by the Christian differentiation. Niebuhr held that faith can and must nourish Christians' search for social justice, and empower their collaboration with those political groups dedicated to it.<sup>9</sup> He also held that faith will nourish the ethical sensitivity and the universal compassion which are indispensable if political commitments are to be redeemed from fanaticism (McCann, 1981: 27-31). This position of Niebuhr's is subtly different than that, for example, of Montaigne, who remarked that he would take public business "in hand" but not "into his lungs and liver" (Montaigne, 1949: 511). Montaigne would engage in public affairs with gentlemanly restraint, his commitment reined in by a sceptical sense of proportion: Niebuhr calls for a passionate commitment, but one that refuses to allow immediate causes to overwhelm the balancing demands of a universal charity. Niebuhr calls for commitment to be broadened, not "moderated".

But Voegelin seldom articulates any passion for social justice strong enough to *need* restraining by his own "spiritual realism". He is closer to Montaigne than to Niebuhr. I have found his analyses of politics and its deformations enlightening and often exciting. What is more, they have often manifested a striking intellectual courage. But he does not succeed in offering a model of the philosopher's responsible but *positive* contribution to political life. He deserves appreciative readers, but not followers.

## APPENDIX

## ERIC VOEGELIN: A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Voegelin was born in Cologne on January 3, 1901. When applying for a visa to travel in Europe in 1948, he gave his full name as Eric Hermann Wilhelm Voegelin. His father was a Lutheran, his mother a Roman Catholic: he was raised as a Lutheran. In 1910 he moved with his family to Vienna, where he lived till 1938.

He entered the University of Vienna in 1919 and received his doctorate in 1922, which was supervised by the constitutional lawyer, Hans Kelsen. He first came to know the U.S.A. when in 1924 he was awarded a Rockefeller Fellowship for two years' study there, from which experience there emerged his first book, *Über die Form des amerikanischen Geistes* (1928).

In the 1920s and 1930s he taught in the University of Vienna, becoming *Privatdozent* in 1929 and Associate Professor in 1936. As these positions carried no salary, he also worked as an Assistant to Kelsen in the Law Faculty, taught in Austrian colleges of higher education, and worked as a private tutor and freelance writer. He began to learn Greek when he was about thirty, in order to read the classics of political science: and he later learned several other languages in order to read primary texts in the original. In 1932 he married Lissy Onken, who survives him: they had no children.

He had made no secret of his antipathy to National Socialism. His two books of 1933, for example, were quickly withdrawn from circulation, and the remaining stocks destroyed by their German publishers. Similarly,

*Die politischen Religionen* (1938) was seized by the Nazis as it came off the press in Vienna, and was reissued the following year in Stockholm (Sandoz, 1981: 50-51, 64). In 1938, therefore, he was dismissed from his post at the University. He tells vividly (AM) how he and his wife eluded the Gestapo and managed to make their way to Zurich. Despite the initial suspicion of the American vice-consul (see Chapter One, above), Voegelin was able to demonstrate that he had been promised a temporary post at Harvard, and was therefore given a United States visa.

After a series of short-term positions, he became an associate professor in the Department of Government at Louisiana in 1942 and a full professor in 1946. Throughout this time, Voegelin was working on the "History of Political Ideas". In August 1948, he told Henry A. Moe of the Guggenheim Foundation that he was working on its last sections: "It will be published by Macmillan, in either two or three volumes, with an aggregate of ca. 2,000-2,500 pages. It is not a textbook but a serious treatise" (Hooy). He abandoned this project, gradually realizing that ideas themselves could not be quasi-autonomous objects of historical enquiry, but were only "a secondary conceptual development". As he says in the *Autobiographical Memoir*, his interest now "moved from ideas to the experiences of reality that engendered a variety of symbols for their articulation". This interest eventually bore fruit in the five volumes of *Order and History*.

Voegelin resided in Louisiana till 1958, and received American citizenship in 1944. In 1958 he returned to Europe, where he taught at the University of Munich, establishing there a new Institute for Political Science. In 1969, he retired and returned to the U.S.A., where he was associated for the rest of his life with the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford, California. He died at Stanford on January 19, 1985.

Note

For the biographical information given here I have drawn on Voegelin's own *Autobiographical Memoir* (AM), his "Autobiographical Statement at Age Eighty-Two" (Voegelin, 1984d), the papers preserved in the Voegelin Archive of the Hoover Institution, and Ellis Sandoz's book *The Voegelinian Revolution* (1981).

## NOTES

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER ONE

1. See, for example, the document entitled *The Road to Damascus: Kairos and Conversion*, signed by Third World Christians from seven countries, published by C.I.I.R., Christian Aid, and the Center of Concern Washington, London 1989. If para. 27 savours a little of sloganizing, para. 78 is more cogent.
2. cf. Terry Eagleton's remarks about some Victorians' expectation that, given the apparent decline of religion, literature might serve as a means of social control: "Since literature, as we know, deals in universal human values rather than in such historical trivia as civil wars, the oppression of women or the dispossession of the English peasantry, it could serve to place in cosmic perspective the petty demands of working people for decent living conditions or greater control over their own lives. . . . Literature from Arnold onwards is the enemy of 'ideological dogma', an attitude that might have come as a surprise to Dante, Milton and Pope" (Eagleton, 1983: 25-26).
3. The project, undertaken by the Louisiana State University Press, will comprise thirty-four volumes. The first volumes will appear in 1990 and completion of the project is planned for the year 2001.
4. The essays in Mieth & Pohier, 1984, bring these two perspectives into dialogue, in comparing the "ethics of autonomy" and the "ethics of liberation".
5. Those characteristics which are not central to the concerns of this thesis will be mentioned only summarily. For a general survey and commentary, see Dumas, 1978.
6. Such theologies naturally differ among themselves with respect to the theoretical ground proposed. As examples, Lamb cites Bultmann's critical appropriation of both liberal theology and the theology of Barth, an appropriation itself grounded in an existentialist philosophy of experience and decision: among Roman Catholics, he cites de Lubac and Daniélou, who ground their theology in the patristic reconciliation of unity and diversity; and Rahner, whose theology is grounded in a transcendentalist anthropology.
7. Clearly, Lamb's typology highlights the advantages of the type of model he favours, just as David Tracy's different typology is implicitly an act of advocacy for his own "Revisionist Model" over against "Orthodox", "Liberal", "Neo-Orthodox" and "Radical" theologies (Tracy, 1975: 22-42). Lamb's account of the positive

characteristics of political theology will be incorporated in the points which follow.

8. To the extent to which the Enlightenment sought freedom from the domination of social life by the churches themselves, it tended to attract the undisguised hostility of previous theological discourse.

9. Fiorenza, 1977: 147-71 gives a historical survey from the Stoics onward. cf. also Fierro, 1977: 71; Forrester, 1988: 18-26, 58-59; Moltmann, 1974: 321-25; Moltmann, 1984: 97-100; Sölle, 1974: 56-59.

10. Voegelin's book of 1938, *Die politischen Religionen*, uses the term "religion" to describe not only the "great redemptive religions" but also any motivating ideology which claimed for itself an absolute status (Voegelin, 1936: 6). He would not later have used such terminology, as he explains in *AM*: 51-52.

11. Thus, Lord Byron could remark, fiercely if half-jokingly, "I have simplified my politics into an utter detestation of all existing governments . . . . The fact is, riches are power, and poverty is slavery all over the earth, and one sort of establishment is no better nor worse for a *people* than another" (Byron, 1984: 139). His position represents a simplified politics, but not a denial of politics. Similarly, Vaclav Havel can play on the assumptions evoked by the term "politics" to commend a paradoxical "anti-political politics" of "practical morality, service for the truth, [of] essentially human and humanly measured care for our fellow-humans" (1988: 397). Of course, such a commendation itself risks distortion; for example, that of disdaining the necessary mediating function of institutions.

12. For Voegelin, it may be noted, political science is simply that activity which "presses beyond the self-understanding of society to the noetic interpretation and thereby pushes the social reality into the position of an object" (*An-E*: 146). See Chapter Five, below.

13. A vision which claims to be of universal application can undoubtedly generate specific interventions, as is shown by Roman Catholic official statements about sexuality, property, human rights, and many other issues. Sometimes, at least, these statements challenge those in power (cf. the documents in O'Brien & Shannon, 1977). The theoretical question that arises from Segundo's remark is whether *any criterion* can conceivably be "here-and-now", or whether it can only emerge from some general philosophical framework, a framework which, naturally, is in its turn constructed from the experience of many instances of the here-and-now.



14. In Segundo's usage, therefore, "ideology" is not a pejorative term. Faith needs to be mediated to specific situations, for it does not itself determine the means of its becoming socially effective. But particular ideologies are provisional, and require no assent beyond that merited by their concrete efficacy. They are thus "relative" with regard to the "absolute" commitment of faith. At a different level, however, faith is relative to ideology, since it is merely notional unless mediated by *some* ideology (1977: 97-124). To accept that theology is contextual, therefore, is to commit oneself to making particular ideological judgments without universalizing them. In this study, unless otherwise stated, "ideology" will be given the more common sense which it has for Voegelin, the sense pithily defined by a character in one of Saul Bellow's novels as "a net of binding falsehoods". Karl Mannheim writes of ideology in a third, intermediate sense. For him it does not denote a conscious political deception, but is used neutrally "to designate the outlook inevitably associated with a given historical and social situation, and the *Weltanschauung* and style of thought bound up with it" (Mannheim, 1936: 125). Ideologies will differ in their truth or falsity. Presumably, growth in maturity will permit increased awareness of and freedom towards one's ideological heritage.

15. The usage, even if problematic, has a solid tradition. Maritain writes as early as 1936, "Capitalism needs no longer to be brought to trial; its condemnation has even become a commonplace to which minds who dread platitude fear to return" (1973: 114).

16. Elsewhere, Moltmann attempts to specify a form of "democratic socialism" which is both "realistic" and "pregnant with the future in Europe" (1979: 67-69). For a discussion which carefully distinguishes the different forms taken by both capitalism and socialism in the contemporary world, cf. Heilbroner, 1980.

17. See, for example, Metz, 1980: 229-37; Lamb, 1982; Forrester, 1988: 128-49; and some of the essays in Boff & Elizondo, 1986.

18. Voegelin's discussion of the biblical Exodus offers a case study of the status of historical achievement: see Chapter Six. The relationship between history and the eschaton will occupy us in Chapter Eight.

19. For a brief discussion of the relationship of theory and practice in philosophy and Christian theology, cf. Post, 1970. For a typology of the relationship between theory and praxis in contemporary Christian theologies, cf. Lamb, 1982: 61-99). For a full-length treatise, cf. Clodovis Boff, 1987.

20. On this understanding praxis-theology is a specific application of William James's epistemological pragmatism: "The pragmatic method starts from the postulate that there is no difference of truth that doesn't make a difference of fact somewhere; and it seeks to determine the meaning of all differences of opinion by making the discussion hinge as soon as possible on some practical or particular issue" (James, 1976: 81).

21. This second emphasis coincides with the grounds of Marx's rejection of the "Young Hegelians". As Kolakowski explains, their "critical philosophy" supposed that the sovereign free spirit "preserves the autonomy of a judge, and the standards by which it measures reality are not derived from that reality but from itself". For Marx's philosophy of praxis, however, "self-awareness must emerge from the immanent pressure of history itself and not from extra-historical principles of rationality" (Kolakowski, 1978: 105).

22. Naturally, Fiorenza generalizes. Sölle approves of the "Latin American tendency" (1976: 421). And Lamb actually *defines* political theology in line with that tendency: "I call 'political' all those theologies which acknowledge that human action, or praxis, is not only the goal but the foundation of theory" (1979: 81).

23. One may add that political theologians characteristically "suspect" the interests of the churches no less than those of outside groups. And their praxis typically leads them to pay as much attention to the churches' concrete social presence as to their formal teaching (Lamb, 1977: 33).

24. Metz's discussion of "pathic praxis" appeared simultaneously with Fierro's book, and so was unavailable to him. Voegelin's philosophical work of the 1930s, referred to at the beginning of this chapter, would constitute praxis in Metz's sense, but not in Fierro's.

25. Segundo's notion of "suspicion" (borrowed from Ricoeur) will be misused unless one follows Ricoeur in understanding it as the necessary *complement* to a disposition of openness to and trust in the traditions one interprets. See Webb, 1988: 14, 141-42.

26. On Voegelin's view of theology as such. cf. Chapter Five, below.

27. In assessing Voegelin's thought from such a vantage point, it will be necessary to beware of "positionism": i.e. of making one's own prior concerns and opinions the decisive criterion for assessment (Germino, 1982: 131). However, one cannot dispense with *some* independent frame of reference, nor simply pretend to inhabit a thinker's own world.

28. On all these factors, in the context of his account of a Basic Christian Community, cf. Galdamez, 1986.

29. Thus, in a recent address, the British playwright David Hare said, "If you ask me for the reasons for the chronic problems of reaction in the British, then it is to the character of their intimate lives, their attitude to their children, their ways of giving and failing to give love, to their uncertainties and crises of spirit I would look, rather than rely on the much more materialistic outlook I had when I was young" (Hare, 1989: 4).

30. Obviously, I do not suggest that the problem of poverty in the affluent industrial nations themselves is negligible. In Britain, for example, as opposed to many societies in which overt destitution is prevalent, poverty is likely to be accompanied by a demoralizing social isolation that heightens the intensity of suffering and hopelessness. For a description of what "poverty" means in Britain, cf. Donnison, 1982: 1-9, 225-28. The author was chairman of the Supplementary Benefits Commission from 1975-80.

31. Holland and Henriot, writing in the U.S.A., make the point concretely: "The rise of the price of oil affects the price of food. The amount of gasoline used by U.S. motorists affects and is affected by our foreign policy. The fashions of New York determine employment patterns in South Korea" (1983: 38).

32. Voegelin's contribution will occupy us especially in Chapters Two and Seven of this study.

33. For a sober projection of "crises in the world-system", cf. Wallerstein, 1984. By "crisis", he means "the circumstance in which an historical system has evolved to the point where the cumulative effect of its internal contradictions makes it impossible for the system to 'resolve' its dilemmas by 'adjustments' in its ongoing institutional patterns".

34. In psychological, as opposed to moral terms, Bergson points to the phenomenon of a weighty, though entirely subjective, sense of the "ebb and flow of history", rooted in the psychic mechanism by which the gains painfully achieved by one generation count for little with the next, whereas the drawbacks of previous achievements loom large (Bergson, 1935: 292-93). Human perception tends to be skewed, dominated by one's needs and discontents. Forecasts of satisfying social progress tend to overlook this psychological quirk.

35. Freud's "realism" does not preclude his believing confidently in the progress of science and reason (*Ibid*: 233, 237-41), without any supporting argument to justify

what smacks of a virtually determinist faith. He does, of course, rule out eschatological hope. It is interesting that Freud does not appear in the index of Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*. Though a chapter of *The Crucified God* argues briefly against Freud's charge that religion and religious hope are infantile and inherently regressive, Moltmann does not contest Freud's account of the dynamics of civilization (1974: 291-316).

36. That "goals", in Metz's sense of the term, tend to be thwarted is a perennial theme of mythology. As Emerson recalled in his essay "Compensation", "Achilles is not quite invulnerable; for Thetis held him by the heel when she dipped him in the Styx, and the sacred waters did not wash that part. Siegfried, in the Nibelungen, is not quite immortal, for a leaf fell on his back whilst he was bathing in the Dragon's blood, and that spot which it covered is mortal. And so it always is" (1906: 65).

37. See Lonergan, 1977: 6-10, who counts Voegelin's distrust of doctrines and his reliance on experience and its symbolic articulations as a kind of praxis.

38. On "philodoxers" cf. Chapter Four, below.

39. As will be seen in Chapter Six below, the divine "disclosure" to Moses is not a private event separable from the social situation of the Hebrews or from the practical response demanded of Moses himself and the whole people. It is true that for Voegelin the revelation is "logically" prior to the action entailed by it: but such priority is compatible with Fiorenza's first model of political theology, in which theory leads to praxis. And the revelation to Moses, though a direct divine initiative, is at least *occasioned* by the Hebrews' oppression in Egypt.

40. On the contrary, neither can one say that worship and community are self-authenticating, apart from the "fundamental orientations of life as a whole". As Cullinan explains (1981: 163), "The primacy of prayer, and therefore the importance of withdrawal in the life of any person of faith, . . . comes from the very nature of God himself and the fact that everything else in life, one's own self and all one's relationships, are at root nothing but participations in the being and life of God". Paradoxically, therefore, disinterested worship itself has a function, the stripping of the false notion that one's self (or one's community) is autonomous.

41. The recent history of the West has rendered this characteristic emphasis of, say, Taoism, almost inaccessible. cf. Poem 57 of the *Tao Te Ching*: "The adherence of all under heaven can only be won by letting-alone. . . . Therefore a sage has said: /So long as I 'do nothing' the people will of themselves be

transformed./So long as I love quietude, the people will of themselves go straight./So long as I act only by inactivity the people will of themselves become prosperous" (Waley, 1977, 211).

42. For example, Mao urged his followers to "oppose book worship" and to "investigate the problem". "To take such an attitude is to seek truth from facts. 'Facts' are all the things that exist objectively; 'truth' means their internal relations, that is, the laws governing them". In Mao's scheme, however, with its "strong" conception of praxis, strict limits are placed on the search for truth. For to "draw correct conclusions" one must throughout be "guided by the general principles of Marxism-Leninism". Again: "Stalin rightly says that 'theory becomes purposeless if it is not connected with revolutionary practice'". It is clear that critical questioning of Marxism-Leninism or "revolutionary practice" in the name of truth is prohibited by Mao (Mao, 1967: 130-32). For Voegelin's argument that Marx himself prohibited such critical questioning, cf. Chapter Nine, below. The suppression of rationality, though, is not an inevitable consequence of the orientation to praxis. We have noted Sölle's repudiation of the equation between praxis and instrumental reason, and Segundo's recognition that "interests" are not immune from challenge.

43. In Chapter Seven we shall consider whether Voegelin himself is guilty of this mistake.

44. The related language of "commitment" can be used in such a way as implicitly to deny the possibility of a disinterested search for truth. Commitment would then degenerate into what Lonergan calls "bias", which is "radically uncritical" and "possesses no standpoint from which it can distinguish between social achievement and the social surd" (1958: 230-32). In their accounts of praxis, Lamb and Davis both seem to share Eagleton's view that knowledge is "constituted by interests". In their different ways, Lonergan and Voegelin acknowledge this conception while deepening it.

45. For example, a Confucian respect for tradition will tend to find different social expression than a Marxist suspicion that tradition favours the economically dominant. From what standpoint does one arbitrate between them?

46. Chapter Nine will discuss Voegelin's critique of the forms taken by an ideologically inspired political irresponsibility. Chapter Ten will discuss his own positive conception of, and discharge of, political responsibility.

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER TWO

1. In an unpublished paper of about 1976, "The Beginning and the Beyond" (Hoov), Voegelin writes, "Aristotle, who has to deal with the same problem [i.e. of the metaxy], prefers to speak of it as the area of divine-human mutual participation, as the metaleptic reality". Voegelin himself often uses this term, "metaleptic reality" or "metalepsis", as equivalent to "metaxy". Somewhat surprisingly, he does not yet use the term "metaxy" in the earlier OH III.
2. OH V uses a different terminology to express the same understanding of reality. In so far as reality is the object of consciousness, Voegelin speaks of the "thing-reality". He gives the name of the "It-reality" to that mysterious reality which "comprehends the partners in being, i.e. God and the world, man and society" (OH V: 16). See also Voegelin, 1981: 245.
3. He recalls some of his own childhood experiences of participation in An-E: 36-51. See the explanatory comment in AM: 71-73.
4. Similarly, of the debate about whether language is "conventional" or "natural", Voegelin writes: "The conventionalist opinion, today the more fashionable one, is moved by the intentionality of consciousness . . . to regard words as phonic signs, more or less arbitrarily chosen to refer to things. The naturalists are moved by a sense that signs must have some sort of reality in common with the things to which they refer, or they would not be intelligible as signs with certain meanings" (OH V: 17). To the suggestion that any such intelligibility is entirely conferred by human creativity, that we thereby *constitute* our world by language (cf. Cupitt, 1937: 48-51), Voegelin would reply that human creativity is, in one of its aspects, *response*.
5. The assertion that there is one single human perspective which cannot coherently be denied naturally allows that *on another level* there is a plurality of individual human perspectives, and a relative tension between subjectivity and objectivity. Thomas Nagel writes that his book *The View From Nowhere* "is about a single problem: how to combine the perspective of a particular person inside the world with an objective view of that same world, the person and his viewpoint included". He adds, "A view or form of thought is more objective than another if it relies less on the specifics of the individual's makeup and position in the world, or on the character of the particular type of creature he is" (1986: 3, 5). Nagel's introduction (*Ibid*: 3-12) is a useful complement to Voegelin.

6. One might also challenge Voegelin with the notion of the "limit-concept": for purposes of understanding, it is sometimes necessary to posit as a concept what is held not to exist in reality. Juan Luis Segundo gives as an example "pure nature without grace". There is in reality no ungraced human nature, but the concept is needed to explicate that of grace itself (Segundo, 1977: 141). If not actually experienced, the "transcendent" or the "infinite" might conceivably be limit-concepts.
7. In the present context I am concerned only with the structure of Voegelin's criticism of Feuerbach, and with the manner in which it illuminates Voegelin's own position, not with its validity.
8. The most important instance for this study is Voegelin's discussion of Marx. See Chapter Nine.
9. Denying that consciousness "exists", William James writes, "I mean only to deny that the word stands for an entity, but to insist most emphatically that it does stand for a function. There is, I mean, no aboriginal stuff or quality of being, contrasted with that of which material objects are made, out of which our thoughts of them are made; but there is a function in experience which thoughts perform, and for the performance of which this quality of being is invoked" (James, 1976: 4).
10. This myth is strikingly different from the more familiar one deriving from Aeschylus, in which Prometheus steals the divine fire and is punished for it. But Voegelin argues that even the Aeschylean Prometheus bears nothing of the meaning with which it was later invested: "The Promethean symbolism of Shaftsbury and Goethe, of Shelley and the young Marx, belong to the age of enlightened, human self-reliance, of the titanism of the artist, and of the defiant revolutionary who will take the destiny of mankind into his own hands. All that has nothing to do with Aeschylus" (OH II: 254).
11. Plato uses not *agnoia* but *amathia* or *anoia* for that kind of ignorance which is the attitude of the alienated one who does not wish to engage in the search. This disposition, sometimes rendered by the biblical term "folly", is an "existential deformation of noetic consciousness" (Voegelin, 1981: 271).
12. We shall find that much of Voegelin's critical energy is directed at theorists who, by tearing the concept of "reason" from its symbolic roots, claim either to banish the transcendent or to dispel "ignorance". John Passmore (1970: 53-59) notes the Stoic conception of a rationalism that claims to dispel ignorance by uniting creature and Creator. In Stoicism, "likeness to God" implies conformity to God's will, but not obedience in the Hebraic

sense. Passmore cites Seneca: "I do not obey God, but I assent to what he has decided". See Eugene Webb's explication of Voegelin (1983: 358-63): Webb distinguishes between two types of knowledge, *episteme* and *doxa*. The transcendental point of orientation may be known "as an object of ultimate intention", not categorically (doxically). *Episteme* is therefore equivalent to the Christian conception of the *cognitio fidei*. Truth is not a formula but that mode of existence which allows the mystery of reality to become luminous. Conversely, "false opinions are a symptom of closed existence, not its essence. Its essence is . . . the eclipse of the Question". Finally, logic may, at best, be effective in challenging "complacent closure", driving the hearer into "a more acute and conscious realization of anxiety" in which the Question may be allowed to re-emerge.

13. Voegelin writes of a plurality of parallel leaps in being in Israel, Hellas, China and India (OH II: 3-4), which, however, differ with regard to the radicalism of their break with cosmological symbolism and the "comprehensiveness and penetration of their advance toward the truth about the order of being".

14. In practice, though, some of Voegelin's detailed analyses raise without, in my opinion, solving the difficult problem of the proper relationship between "attunement to being" and the necessities of pragmatic action. This theme will recur throughout our study.

15. For example: differentiations open the way to previously unsuspected possibilities of distortion. See the discussion of St. Paul in Chapter Eight.

16. An analogy may be seen between this account and the concept of evolution, as enunciated by Teilhard de Chardin: nothing comes to be "which has not already existed in an obscure and primordial way" (*The Phenomenon of Man*, quoted in Segundo, 1977: 68). Lesslie Newbigin (1986: 52-53) speaks of the notion of "conversion" as being, in one of its aspects, what Voegelin would call a differentiation: the converted understanding might "find a place for the truth that was embodied in the former vision and yet at the same time offer a wider and more inclusive rationality than the older one could". Voegelin notes that the symbol of the depth is preserved as an insight in "contemporary depth-psychologies and psychologies of the unconscious". Where these become potentially deformed is where they are tempted to claim that the depth has a topography amenable to scientific specification (1970b: 225).

17. Plato's repudiation of the Homeric gods, for example, is presented as a differentiation which aims to preserve the essential Homeric insight while countering prevalent misunderstandings (Voegelin, 1981: 273-74). On the other



hand, just as Voegelin thinks that contemporary psychologies deform the symbol of the "depth", by claiming scientific knowledge of it, so he thinks Hegel deforms the symbol of the "Beyond", or the "Boundless" (the *Apeiron*), by claiming to "absorb the beyond of consciousness into consciousness itself" (Voegelin, 1971c: 351). In doing this, according to Voegelin, Hegel dispels that *agnoia* which is inherent in metaxic existence. In fact, the very aim of Hegel's philosophy is to replace ignorance with "actual knowledge" (*wirkliches Wissen*) (SPG: 40).

Hegel's ubiquity as a point of reference for Voegelin is not reflected in the present study, because Voegelin's discussions are so complex as to require lengthy treatment, and yet are marginal to our present purpose. In his "Response to Professor Altizer", Voegelin records his lifelong struggle with Hegel, "a thinker whom I consulted at every step in my own work" but whom at first "I simply could not understand" (1975b: 768). The major references are SPG: 40-44; ER: 255-70 (on Marx's use of Hegel); OH IV: 260-71; OH V: 54-70. Among Voegelin's essays, see especially 1971c (the fullest discussion), 1975b: 768-71; 1981: 256-57. The reference to OH V suggests that Voegelin was still working on Hegel at the time of his death. In general, Voegelin's response to Hegel becomes increasingly appreciative and decreasingly polemical, though he always maintains a stance of dissent.

18. On the dispute between Plato and the sophists and its lasting importance, see the section on theology in Chapter Four below.

19. It is *hybris* and revolt *towards the ground* that Voegelin is condemning, not revolution as a political act. We shall see throughout this study that "Order" is not stasis, and attunement to it not an inherently conservative act. His choice of language, though, is of interest. Complacency and apathy are equally offences against faith, hope and love, but do not provoke from him so explicit an attack; and one might consider Plato's equanimity a dubious virtue. This point will be discussed shortly, and again in Chapter Eight.

20. For another example, see Voegelin's discussion of Wilhelm von Humboldt's educational theory and its consequences. Voegelin argues that this theory, decisive for the ethos of German universities, represents human development as absolute, and is therefore a narcissistic closure of the spirit. In particular, people educated to non-public autonomous existence are unlikely to resist ideological movements. They have received an education (*Bildung*, but not an upbringing (*Erziehung*)) (Voegelin, 1985: 17-23).

21. The most vivid example of Comte's messianic self-consciousness is that of his *Hygiène cérébrale*. Voegelin cites the final volume of the *Cours*, to which Comte appended a kind of intellectual autobiography, the *Préface Personnelle*. Having gathered his material, Comte "denied himself the reading of any literature which had a bearing on the subject-matter on which he was working. When he approached the second part of the *Cours*, that is, the volumes on sociology, he went further and stopped reading any philosophical and political periodicals, dailies or monthlies. . . . [Hence] the 'precision, energy and consistency' of his conceptions" (ER: 146-47).
22. See also Voegelin, 1974b: 510-12, on the conservative and revolutionary aspects of Comte's thought.
23. "All science is implicitly committed to a distinction between its concepts, theories and descriptions and the facts of the matter. To give a realist interpretation of scientific theories does not require us, indeed it forbids us, to assume that we have attained some ultimately valid description of the world" (W. Outhwaite, in Skinner, 1985: 38).
24. We shall return to each of these issues in Part Two of the study.
25. For a critical discussion of the thought of Isaiah Berlin, perhaps the most persuasive advocate of a radically pluralistic notion of the good, cf. Parekh, 1982: 23-47.
26. For a discussion of the non-noetic excellence which Aristotle calls *phronesis*, and which Voegelin recognizes, see Chapter Ten.
27. Earlier in this chapter, we noted Voegelin's recognition, following Heraclitus, that openness to the ground of being expresses itself through love and hope, as well as through knowledge. But he does not explore how this openness might be expressed, and I shall suggest that Voegelin *assumes* that action does not express love.
28. I suggest, in passing, that where Voegelin is least reliable is rarely in formal argument, but in the biases that become apparent only as they gleam fitfully through such loose diction as I here indicate. This theme will be considered in Chapter Nine.
29. Voegelin sometimes approaches the depreciation of politics implicit in the famous couplet from Oliver Goldsmith's poem, "The Traveller": "How small, of all that human hearts endure, / That part which laws or kings can cause or cure". But Goldsmith did not live as a peasant in the Thirty Years War, or as a Jew under Hitler.

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER THREE

1. This chapter will discuss the general principles underlying Voegelin's account of symbolization. Chapter Four will then consider four specific modes of symbolic discourse: myth, classical philosophy, Christian theology and history. A fifth mode of discourse, that of politics will be examined separately in Chapter Five.
2. This distinction does not, of course, imply that the "experience as such" can be apprehended without some act of interpretation: only that the experience itself is not amenable to sceptical questioning in the same sense as is *any conceivable* interpretation.
3. On the dangers of science's "murdering to dissect", see Bohm, 1983: 28-32.
4. The ability to distinguish between the knowable and the unknowable does not imply that one can specify the precise boundary between them. As P. J. Fitzpatrick, writing under the name of G. Egner, has neatly written of theology, "not only is our linguistic medium inadequate; it is inadequate to the task of drawing bounds to its inadequacy" (in McCabe, 1987: 155).
5. See Milan Kundera's novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, in which the narrator discusses "the parade" as a symbolic event. For Franz, a Swiss academic studying in Paris, a "demonstration" was a step out of the "unreal" world of books (though books, in fact, made up his "real" world!), a bracing immersion in the world where history is made. But Sabina, a Czech who had been made to participate in the Communist May Day parade since her childhood, finds even Western protest marches against the Soviet invasion of her own country intolerable. Her French friends are amazed. But "she would have liked to tell them that behind Communism, Fascism, behind all occupations and invasions lurks a more basic, pervasive evil and that the image of that evil was a a parade of people marching by with raised fists and shouting identical syllables in unison. But she knew she would never be able to make them understand." (Kundera, 1984: 99-100). The "thing-in-itself" of a parade *cannot exist* apart from meanings generated by their respective experiences: capable of revision, but not easily so.
6. Don Cupitt, criticizing a position he calls "objective symbolism", assumes that whereas the "reality referred to" cannot be an object of investigation the symbols themselves can be such an object: "We are stuck on the near side of our symbols: we cannot get at the far side to see how they work." Symbols are historical constructions and "there is no transcending our historicity"

(Cupitt, 1986: 96, 98). Voegelin, however, is both more radical and more consistent when he also denies that the "near-side" of the symbol can be known autonomously. It is mistaken to invest the symbol with a reality denied to what is symbolized.

7. The use of Koestler's narrative has perhaps demonstrated that Voegelin's understanding of symbolism is not peculiar to himself. He claims to articulate the structure of human experience in general, which anyone can bring to awareness by anamnestic meditation. There is, in fact, a deep affinity between Voegelin's work and Paul Tillich's account of the nature of reason and symbol. (Though Tillich (1886-1965) was writing his *Systematic Theology* at the same time as Voegelin was working on *Order and History*, neither writer ever mentions the other.) Tillich, too, understands "reason" to be far more than "technical reason" (1968, I: 79-117). He speaks of "grasping reason" and "shaping reason", of "controlling knowledge" and "receiving knowledge", of the tensions within reason (See also Kelsey, 1989: 139-41). Again, mystery actively moves to reveal itself, but only because it is also the "object" of "ultimate concern" (*Ibid*: 14-16, 122-24). Voegelin differs from Tillich in exploring the rational and historical structure of specific symbols (i.e. in terms of compactness, differentiation, and deformation): and in regarding such exploration as the key to understanding political reality as well as theological language. See, for example, the analysis of race symbolism in this chapter, and of the symbols of "justice" and "exodus" in Chapters Five and Six respectively.

8. It is this sense of hierarchy which underlies the virtue of "attunement". See Chapter Two.

9. For example: the psychologist Robert J. Lifton has criticized Freud's contention that all interest in immortality is compensatory, and that one's only appropriate attitude to death is to face it unflinchingly; to excise the experience, so to speak, of immortality. Lifton posits five modes of conceiving (and therefore symbolizing) the experience of "death and the continuity of life", the experience that life transcends death. A person or a community may experience a shift in emphasis from one to another mode, but the experience itself cannot be prohibited, either by decree of sceptical intellectuals or by self-censorship (Lifton, 1976: 29-47). While partially endorsing Lifton's view, Voegelin also slights him needlessly and inaccurately (*Conv*: 130).

10. The same belief has been cogently expressed by the Australian poet Les A. Murray: "Since the spiritual dimension universally exists in human beings, it has to

be dealt with by them in some way or other; a sacramentally minded Christian would say that it has to be fed. It can be wrongly fed, though, with dreadful results for the world. God's Spirit may stir our soul and then not be allowed to enlighten it". Murray suggests, for example, that human sacrifice persists in our civilization. "Surely there's a distinction to be made here between the literal and the metaphorical? My answer is, there may be, but I don't know of one watertight enough to prevent the blood from seeping through it. When I hear someone say, as I did yet again the other day, that this country needs a war to restore and cement its sense of community, I recognize that as a call to literal human sacrifice, to be performed for one of the classic archaic reasons" (Murray, 1984: 110- 11).

11. That this essay was written in the U.S.A. should not disguise the courage involved in its composition, for it summarizes themes in Voegelin's works written in German in the 1930s. For summary accounts of these, see Sebba, 1982: 10-14; Byrnes, 1973: 55-67. For an account of "Judaism and Christianity in the Ideology and Politics of National Socialism", see Scholder, 1989: 168-81.

12. Analysis of society in terms of class, for example, works with "political ideas" in Voegelin's sense. A group, by being called a "class", is *deemed* to have shared characteristics and interests. This putative common ground, rather than any of the indefinitely varied beliefs, capacities, ages or temperaments represented among its members, can then be represented as the proper source of their social allegiances.

13. As Voegelin explains in a footnote, he does recognize differences of "ethical and metaphysical value" between ideas. Political ideas may be necessary and illuminating or they may be corrupt. They may or may not be held and propagated in good faith. But such differences of value do not necessarily depend upon their respective "correctness" as pictures of social reality.

14. Klemm thought in terms of the assimilation of the active race, the conquerors, into the passive, or conquered, race. Even conquest itself, therefore, tended to promote the emergence of an egalitarian society. For Gobineau, on the contrary, "cultural values are secure as long as the strong, efficient races are able to retain their dominant position in the symbiosis": assimilation entails deterioration, exhaustion and extinction (*Ibid*: 298-99, 302).

15. Voegelin notes that in Hobbes's view "the Christian realm of light was the sovereign state-church unit" and the realm of darkness was the Roman Catholic Church: "since that time the stream of political ideas has become a stream of satanistic ideas" (*Ibid*: 308).

16. It would be a gross error to attribute such demonizing constructions to a few fanatics only. As Kermode points out (1967: 112), the word "Jew" appeared in lower case in all editions of the works of T. S. Eliot before the last edition within his lifetime, that of 1963.

17. Voegelin wrote this provocative passage in 1940. The sequence could readily be extended, as scientific paradigms succeed each other at an increasing rate. But at least the units of the sequence (socio-biology, cybernetics, etc.) are now quite likely to be "deconstructed" by those outside the intellectual circles which propagate them. Voegelin later became sanguine that the "superstition of science" (not, of course, science itself) was being overcome, at least in the scholarly world. We shall discuss this hopefulness in Chapter Eight.

18. In the 1930s Voegelin seems always to have conveyed his political opinions indirectly (though unmistakably). Thus, in an essay of 1936 written in Vienna, in the course of attacking rigid positivism in science, he slips from argument to apparently irrelevant (but, surely, calculated) invective: "Science is to provide the key for the comprehension of the world. All other ways of understanding and experiencing the world . . . are frequently unmasked as ideology, dissolved as false problems, denounced as the fabrication (in order to stupefy the people, or to gain personal wealth or power) of Jesuits, Freemasons, Jews, or the bourgeois" (1936b: 597, my translation). As Robert Knight implies (1989: 797), to ridicule anti-Semitic stereotypes at that time went against the cultural grain in Austria scarcely less than in Germany.

19. See Chapter Seven, below.

20. This study is concerned with Voegelin's philosophy. To examine the difficult matter of how effective or otherwise he was as an "anti-Nazi" would require a quite different method of socially contextualized biography, beyond the competence of the present writer. It is clear that observing the conventions of academic discourse imposed serious limits on his overt opposition to National Socialism. But since he lived in Austria from as early as 1924 he was inevitably distanced from the brutal practical struggle. He was resourceful in helping others at risk to escape Germany, as a good deal of correspondence in the Hoover Archive makes clear (for example, a letter of August 1938 written from Zurich to F. A. von Hayek arranging assistance for the historian Friedrich von Engel-Janosi). Aurel Kolnai's passionate but cavalier book of 1938 (see the index for the many but unsystematic allusions to Voegelin), which depicts Voegelin's nuanced, patrician criticisms of the Nazis as

an inadequate repudiation of them, was published outside the Axis countries. Perhaps with charges such as these in mind, Gregor Sebba refers to Voegelin's books of 1933 as follows: "When I read these two books, I knew that Voegelin would be on the Nazi list when Austria fell. I still wonder how he had the nerve to publish both books in Hitler's Germany, and how two German publishers could accept them" (1982: 11).

21. A second break in his programme will be noted in Chapter Four, in the section on History.

22. Quentin Skinner describes the hermeneutic approach to the human sciences as an approach that "will do justice to the claim that the explanation of human action must always include - and perhaps even take the form of - an attempt to recover and interpret the meanings of social actions from the point of view of the agents performing them" (Skinner, 1985: 6). Of course there still smoulders the debate on how far such comprehension, such a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer), is possible. See Chapter One above, on the need to balance the hermeneutic of suspicion with the hermeneutic of openness or trust. Voegelin's reliance on the sources, of course, did not lead him to disregard secondary scholarship. His acute judgment of the monographic literature covering the subjects of his enquiry may be sampled in QH I: 148-62 & 282-303, where he assesses the state of scholarship on the Pentateuchal history and the Imperial Psalms respectively.

23. The case of Comte was discussed in Chapter Two, that of Marx will occupy us in Chapter Nine. It will be apparent that this thesis seeks, as one element of its method, to apply the same critical strategy to Voegelin himself. He knows that life is not only *noesis*, and we have seen that he cites Aristotle's statement that neither the *zoon noetikon* nor the *zoon politikon* has an ontological primacy over the other. But he invariably stresses *noetic* adequacy as the test of symbols and movements. If not "ideological" this virtual exclusion of reciprocity may at least signify a failure to apperceive.

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER FOUR

1. As these examples indicate, because the depth of reality is not experienced as static, mythical symbolism is typically embodied in *narrative*.
2. Voegelin introduces an elaborate analysis of "Plato's Egyptian Myth" by noting that "the techniques for the interpretation of myths have only quite recently been developed to a point where the analysis of the late Platonic myths can be approached with some hope of success" (1947: 307).
3. Gregor Sebba writes, "It has been well said of myth that those who do not live in it cannot know what it is, while those who live in it do not know that it is myth." (1982: 35). Our account suggests that this formulation, which postulates two mutually exclusive modes of consciousness, is too simple. It is possible, indeed essential, to *live with* myth, reflectively and discriminatingly. On Voegelin's treatment of the creation narrative of *Genesis*, see Turner 1988a.
4. Like Voegelin, Ernst Cassirer argues that myth must not be explained away, either by reinterpreting it as allegory or by reducing it from "belief" to "make-believe" (1962: 72-79; see also Kolakowski, 1982: 13-16). It has its own valid cognitive principle. Both the positivist view that myth is a primitive pseudo-science and the "functionalist" view (of such thinkers as Durkheim), according to which myth has a social rather than a cognitive function, purport to uncover the "real" meaning of myth, a meaning unknown to or unacknowledged by those who accepted the myth as valid. Their perspective, by a dubious hermeneutical procedure, is crudely overridden. Raymond Williams lists the various senses given to the word "myth": including the pejorative sense of an untrustworthy invention; and the "would-be positive" sense by which myth is either linked to post-Christian accounts of the depths and creativity of the imagination, or becomes the medium for Christian restatement (1976: 176-78).
5. See the section on theology, below. Scientists, of course, *need not* regard their findings as absolute; the destructive mistake will only be made by those who falsely oppose science to myth.
6. Perhaps, indeed, myth is the most precise instrument for communicating "the psychic excitement of the experience of transcendence" (An-E; 22), of articulating the "luminous" dimension of consciousness. So Cassirer says of Plato, "we cannot think of Platonic philosophy without thinking of the Platonic myths. In these myths - in the



myths of the 'supercelestial place', of the prisoners in the cave, of the soul's choice of its future destiny, of the judgment after death, Plato expressed his most profound metaphysical thoughts and intuitions. And at the end he gave his natural philosophy in an entirely mythical form: he introduced, in *Timaeus*, the conceptions of the demiurge, of the good and the evil world soul, of the twofold creation of the world" (1946: 71-72).

7. Durkheim, of course, also holds that religious myth has the function of conserving the social order, not challenging it.

8. Hesiod, in fact, fits A. D. Nock's definition of the prophet: one who "experiences a sudden and profound dissatisfaction with things as they are, is fired with a new idea, and launches out on a new path in a sincere conviction that he has been led by something external and objective" (Nock, 1933: 2-3). Prophecy, like philosophy, is "resistance to disorder". The fact that Hesiod's advance towards truth is propelled by his experience of injustice might well be taken as paradigmatic by political theology. But, as we shall see in Chapter Seven, Voegelin adopts the Aristotelian position that the privileged epistemological perspective is that of the contemplative mature person, the *spoudaios*, not that of the marginalized as such.

9. See, for example, Voegelin's favourable review of R. B. Levinson's *In Defense of Plato* a work written against Karl Popper's attack on Plato in *The Open Society and its Enemies* (Voegelin, 1954).

10. In Voegelin's interpretation, the *Republic*, for example, is elaborately arranged round such symbolic fields as height/depth, darkness/light and ascent/descent (OH III: 46-134).

11. For Voegelin's discussion of the sophists, see OH II: 267-331. There is the hermeneutical problem that, apart from a few fragments, we know of the sophists' teaching only through Plato's own writings. Voegelin thinks it likely that their formative contribution to the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle is disguised by the manifest points of disagreement (*Ibid*: 276-77).

12. On the thinkers of the Enlightenment, see Chapter Seven.

13. A sardonic footnote in Voegelin's essay on Bultmann, shows how Voegelin himself distinguishes true from false philosophers: "'*Das Dasein übernimmt sich selbst*' is a stock phrase of Heidegger's existentialism. The English reader should not be deprived of the joy of knowing that the phrase in German has a double meaning not intended by its author. It can be rendered either as 'existence

takes charge of itself' (the meaning intended) or as 'existence overreaches itself' (what, indeed, it does when it takes charge of itself). Needless to say, no philosopher would play with the fire of 'taking charge' of his existence." (Voegelin, 1964a: 68). The jibe reflects Voegelin's deepest convictions, as well as his taste for cut-and-thrust.

14. The dimensions of the symbol were discussed in Chapter Two. Voegelin's most systematic discussion occurs in the essay of 1974, "Reason: the Classic Experience" (An-E: 89-115).

15. Elsewhere, Voegelin speaks of the divine 'pull' (*helkein*, of which the counter-movement is the human search (*zetein*) (Voegelin, 1971a: 71). There is no noesis, therefore, that is divorced from a loving openness to the ground.

16. See Voegelin's critique of Bultmann (Voegelin, 1964a).

17. Although in a more formal context Voegelin might well have refined this statement, which was made in a recorded conversation, it does not misrepresent his views. See, for example, Voegelin, 1971a: 88.

18. Even if one accepts so broad a conception of the scope of theology as does Bernard Lonergan (whose work was well-known to Voegelin), namely that theology is a discipline which "mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix" (Lonergan, 1971: xi), it is clear that Voegelin is scarcely concerned to "mediate" in any such way. Similarly, Kelsey describes Tillich's aim as that of mediating between contemporary culture and historical Christianity in order to demonstrate that the two are not incompatible (1989: 136).

19. This aspect of the Pauline differentiation will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

20. This is the key to Voegelin's critique of Bultmann (1964a). Bultmann's existentialism entails "untruth by omission", for it is only the omission of whole sectors of reality and experience which lend to the positive propositions their appearance of consistency.

21. A parallel passage in the *Republic* (Plato, 1955: 95-97), is discussed at some length in Voegelin's unpublished paper of 1977, "Deformations of Faith" (Hoov).

22. According to the *Seventh Letter* and the *Second Letter*, Plato refused to write down the core of his philosophy and objected when his student Dionysius wrote

it down. Those who could understand did not need the written propositions, those who did not understand would pervert them (OH III: 19-20).

23. In fact, the notion of proof does occur in the Preface to the *Proslogion*: Anselm recalls that he "began to wonder if perhaps it might be possible to find one single argument that for its proof required no other save itself, and that by itself would suffice to prove that God really exists. . . . (Anselm, 1965: 102-03). This occurrence does not invalidate Voegelin's argument, especially as Prefaces tend to be written last!

24. By "the ecumenic situation" Voegelin means one where different cultural traditions co-exist, and where those with political power do not seek to impose a cultural or religious uniformity over their political subjects. Even defective doctrine, therefore, might have a valid social function, if the insight it conserves is less corrupt than the rival doctrines which oppose it.

25. See the stimulating and very positive remarks on the critical power of the Christological, Trinitarian and Mariological doctrines in Voegelin's letter to Schutz (Opitz & Sebba: 449-57). For example, "The achievement of the Trinity dogma is to have combined, in one theological symbol, experiences that must remain differentiated if speculative fallacies are to be avoided". These experiences are three: the radical transcendence of God; the divine transforming intervention into nature and human nature; and the presence of the spirit in the community of the faithful. Voegelin traces the fatal consequences of excising any of these experiences in the name of "radical monotheism" (*Ibid*: 454-55).

26. An example is the term "metaphysics" itself: its meaning in Aristotle, its hardening into "a propositional science of principles, universals, and substances", and the eventual response of Voltaire, who rejected the misconceived crystallization rather than the classical noesis of which the Enlightenment "knows nothing" (An-E: 193-94). Similarly, Voegelin finds the theological terms "person" and "nature" both misleading and redundant: misleading to contemporary Christians who are not burdened by the intellectual problems which once provoked their use, and redundant because they do not analyse such Christians' *own experience* (Conv: 94-96).

27. Noting that when Voegelin disparages "theology" he tends to mean these derivative codifications, the American scholar Michael Morrissey reports that Voegelin, when challenged in later life about his "religious affiliation", was known to call himself a "pre-Nicene Christian" (1988: 410, 414).

28. In this matter, as often elsewhere, Robert Musil's great novel, *The Man Without Qualities* is an admirable companion to the reader of Musil's younger contemporary, Voegelin. According to Ulrich, the novel's protagonist, different faiths each, by their doctrinal systems, seek to shelter a "highly important" "pattern of inner movement". But the churches have always mistrusted visionary experience, just as a bureaucrat mistrusts "any individual spirit of enterprise". "And when the spiritual despotism of the churches and their terminology became obsolete, not suprisingly this condition of ours came to be regarded as no more than a flight of fancy. Why after all should a bourgeois civilization, taking over from a religious civilization, be more religious than its predecessor?!" (1979, III: 117).

29. See Lawrence, 1983: 338-45. It is symptomatic that Voegelin cites as one example of propositional theology Anselm's ontological argument, which is commonly envisaged as a piece of *philosophical* reasoning (cf. the remarks on Anselm as philosopher/theologian in Copleston, 1950: 156-65).

30. The two terms are interchangeable for the purposes of this discussion, perhaps distinguishable in that dogma implies a more specific reference to a given teaching authority. Lonergan suggests that dogma embodies a claim to be the one and only true proposition on any issue, whereas doctrine might accept the relativity of linguistic and cultural contexts (Lonergan, 1971: 333). But Sobrino's usage simply differs; see note 32.

31. According to Lonergan, doctrine *presupposes* "conversion" and a communal engagement in the search for truth: "doctrines, based on conversion, are opposed to the aberrations that result from the lack of conversion. Accordingly, while the unconverted may have no real apprehension of what it is to be converted, at least they have in doctrines the evidence both that there is something lacking in themselves and that they need to pray for illumination and to seek instruction" (Lonergan, 1971: 299).

32. On the Christological dogmas, cf. Sobrino, 1978: 312-26. Like Lonergan, Sobrino denies that dogma withers the capacity for experience. Any dogma, after all, must itself be interpreted by the recipient, and this interpretation presupposes some experiential basis, some sharing in the community's own participation in reality. According to J. L. Segundo, "Dogma is not an encapsulated version of the absolute": "we reject the idea that dogma is a translation of the *outcome* or result of the educational process. . . . there is no end to the process of learning to learn. . . . Dogma merely defines the boundaries within which we can say that we are still

operating inside [the] same educational tradition" (1977: 175, 180). In this respect, the theologians cited here represent the contemporary consensus. Reviewing a pair of biographies (on Barth and Tillich), John Updike sums up limpidly: "theology is not a provable accumulation, like science, nor is it a succession of enduring monuments, like art. It must always unravel and be reknit" (1983b: 835).

33. From a very different perspective, the same ecclesiastical tendency to mitigate the demands of the Gospel by specifying minimum demands of belief and conduct, is identified and discussed in Segundo, 1977: 179-80, 211-16. Voegelin would not, of course, claim that the churches had available to them some astute "alternative strategy" by which they could have averted all danger of rebellion.

34. Even Justin was first attracted to Christianity on non-philosophical grounds: "I myself used to rejoice in the teachings of Plato and to hear evil spoken of Christians. But as I saw that they showed no fear in face of death and of all other things which inspire terror, I reflected that they could not be vicious and pleasure-loving." (cited in Nock, 1933: 255). Conversion is indeed the fulfilment of a search, but searches are of many kinds (*Ibid*: 254, on the *Acts of the Apostles*). Naturally, Justin's reminiscence would not warrant one's *contrasting* Christians with philosophers, since Nock shows that philosophy, too, attracted converts because it was a way of life (*Ibid*: 164-86).

35. Naturally, I do not suggest that "The Gospel and Culture" does nothing but depreciate Christianity. It contains valuable insights about the specific spiritual dynamic of the Christian movement. For a later, less tendentious comparison of the philosophical and Christian movements, see Voegelin, 1981: 279-85.

36. This point will be expanded in Chapter Six, below.

37. Such assessments are sometimes made in passing, almost instinctively: as when he gives the opinion that the Gospel holds out its promise "to the poor in spirit, that is to minds enquiring, even on a culturally less sophisticated level than Justin's" (1971a: 661). One partial exception, his early unpublished paper "Clericalism", will be mentioned in Chapter Ten.

38. Kolakowski rightly insists that the mere assent to doctrinal propositions does not itself have significance as an "instrument of communion with the Sacred": "our brain stores countless fragments of vitrified knowledge, connected to nothing, serving no purpose . . . and there is no reason why some of them should not be theological in content". Religion, on the contrary, is "a

way of life in which understanding, believing and commitment emerge together in a single act (something which is expressed with difficulty in 'doctrinal' terms)" (1982: 218-19). For additional comments on this theme, see McCarroll 1986: 285-91.

39. See OH IV: 304 for five "insights into the structure of history which are generally valid". Their core is contained in the quotation from OH IV given in the next paragraph. For an overview of Voegelin's philosophy of history, cf. Webb, 1981. See also Porter, 1975; Sebba, 1982; Gebhardt (in Sandoz 1982: 67-86); McKnight (in McKnight, 1978: 26-45). See chapter Eight for one topic which might have fallen within this section, Voegelin's thinking about the notion of human progress.

40. Voegelin's opposition to any positivist conception of historical fact is complemented by his rejection of what he holds to be the contrary reductionism, that by which Bultmann dissolves historical phenomena into states of consciousness. In Bultmann, "the Torah changes into the 'thou shalt' that is alive in everyman's conscience"; "the historical relation between the Law and the Gospel, between the Old and the New Testament, is thus transformed into the ontological tension between the natural existence of man and the Christian existence in faith. History, the sense of the *progressus* of mankind in time, shrouded in the mystery of a meaning incompletely revealed - the history we have in mind as long as we are not existentialists - has somehow disappeared." (Voegelin, 1964: 69). "As Karl Rahner puts the matter, human beings do not "grasp [their] transcendental subjectivity by means of an unhistorical reflection and introspection which is possible in the same way at every point in time": but, on the other hand, "the moment that history . . . no longer grasps its transcendental depths as the condition which makes genuine history possible, this very history itself also becomes blind" (Rahner, 1978: 140).

41. See also the exchange which began with Voegelin's review of Hannah Arendt's book of 1951, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Voegelin, 1953a: 68-85). In his closing summary of the exchange, Voegelin suggests that Arendt is willing to accept the "well-distinguished complexes of phenomena" (of liberalism and totalitarianism) as "ultimate, essential units". For him, historical investigation "inevitably will start from the phenomena" without "accepting the units thrown up in the stream of history at their face-value". Arendt allows facts to control her enquiry, whereas Voegelin "starts from" facts but quickly moves to the level of philosophy. What is decisive for him about the political movements is not their bitter opposition on the "scene of history" but their close relationship (*not*, as Arendt takes him to say, their "sameness") on the "level of essence". It is

clear that Voegelin does not merely distinguish between two levels of historical enquiry. He specifies their comparative status. The over-riding emphasis on meaning revealed in his debate with Arendt is consistent with his stance with regard to theology. He is concerned to identify a social process which "includes not only the totalitarian movements but also political movements apparently opposed to them" (McCarroll, 1981: 17).

42. Thus, Voegelin holds that ideological movements have the goal of "stopping history"; he means not, obviously, that the sequence of events in time is somehow checked, but that the struggle for order is renounced.

43. Voegelin suggests (AM: 106) that "philosophy of history" as a topic does not go back further than the eighteenth century, and was from its beginning marked by this reductionism. Among the advocates of unilinear history, Voegelin numbers Voltaire (for whom human progress led up to the mature reasoning of the Enlightenment philosophers), Comte (see above, Chapter Two), Marx (see below, Chapter Nine), and Hegel, who, in Voegelin's view (1971c) regarded his own consciousness as the consummation of divine revelation. Naturally, within the ideological framework determined by "intramundane religious sentiment" the quality of the empirical insight might well be remarkable (ER: 12).

44. This explains Voegelin's interest in those Renaissance thinkers who dissented from Eurocentrism: "we have letters from Poggio in which he shows himself sick and tired of the glory that was Greece and Rome and ranks the military and political achievements of Tamerlane higher than those of Caesar" (Voegelin, 1944b: 747). Eventually, this particular "closed horizon" was breached by the irruption of new materials - especially those from the pre-classic and non-Western civilizations, as Voltaire realized (ER: 8-9). But in Voegelin's view, Voltaire was closed in another sense, to transcendent meaning. It was Voegelin's realization that *he himself* was in danger of constructing too straightforward a linear narrative, one that would insufficiently stress "the richness of the spirit as it reveals itself all over the earth in a multitude of hierophanies", which prompted his rethinking of the scheme of *Order and History*. This explains the gap of seventeen years between the publication of OH III and OH IV (Sebba, 1982: 51-56). Whatever criticisms one directs at Voegelin, I suggest one must admire the integrity with which he pursued the truth he discerned, even when this required the re-structuring of his entire life's work.

45. In a different context, almost identical questions are posed in OH IV: 316. In "History and Gnosis" (1964), Voegelin criticizes St. Paul for going on in *Romans* to offer his own answer to these questions, since the

questions identify mysteries, not problems. However, the "answer" Paul provides is not an empirical solution but the assertion in faith that the mercy of God embraces all. His answer, far from dissolving a mystery, articulates a still deeper one!

46. A more comprehensive consideration of Voegelin's reflections on history would include the following elements: (1) his several discussions of the varied typologies of history (such as the distinction between "sacred" and "profane" history which was an influential symbol from Augustine to Bossuet (e.g., ER: 3-34); (2) his exploration of "historiogenesis", i.e. a form of "mytho-speculation" which traces the origin and cause of a given society's order (QH IV: 59-113); (3) his positive account of the differentiation attained by the Christian world which, in his view, alone proved capable of developing a philosophy of history (QH II: 22).



## NOTES FOR CHAPTER FIVE

1. For brief resumés of Voegelin's political theory, see Germino, 1967; Germino, 1982; Havard, 1982: 107-14.
2. As Schumacher remarks (1977: 63), any "restriction in the use of instruments of cognition has the inevitable effect of narrowing and impoverishing reality". Positivism, for example, dismisses all theoretical constructions which are not confined within its own horizon.
3. Popper's attack on Plato in Volume I of *The Open Society and its Enemies* was first published in 1945. Voegelin's essay of 1947, "Plato's Egyptian Myth", was incorporated virtually intact into OH III: 171-80.
4. See Crick, 1982, especially Chapter One on the nature of political activity, and Chapter Two, "A Defence of Politics against Ideology". Crick regards politics as the process, conducted in freedom, which negotiates and reconciles plural and potentially conflicting human purposes.
5. As such they naturally deserve attention. Voegelin began his career as a student of law, and never abandoned his interest. There is in the Hoover Archive a typescript of 98 pages, dated 1957, material given to the students attending Voegelin's course on Jurisprudence at the Louisiana State University Law School.
6. For an extended critique of any "political science" or "political theory" which prescind from questions of order and focuses exclusively on secondary systematizations, see Voegelin's essay of 1944, "Political Theory and the Pattern of General History". He insists instead that "the so-called non-political ideas, as for instance the eschatological sentiments and ideas, are the great source of political fermentation and revolution throughout Western history to this day" (1944b: 753).
7. Similarly, Dumas (1978: 118) points out how many changes of political organization are undergone by the Chosen People: "a tribal confederation; temporary, charismatic judges who do not found a dynasty; a hereditary monarchy and the fragmentation of the kingdom; deportation; colonial dependence; wars of independence; controlled independence; and then a last revolt leading to annihilation. One might say that every kind of political regime is attempted and often endured without the establishment of any lasting ideal". Certainly, the "identity" of Israel is not constituted by the details of its political order.

8. The central works of Voegelin's later years - *Order and History* itself, and such essays as "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme" - are scarcely concerned with politics in the narrower sense. His views on specifically "political" phenomena will be found mainly in the "History of Political Ideas" (which was begun to a publisher's commission but overwhelmingly outgrew the agreed dimensions), and in the reviews, lectures and papers by which he subsidized his unremunerative scholarly work. After 1958, given greater financial security in Munich and then in Stanford, he wrote almost no book reviews and far fewer "occasional" essays. But his increased freedom to focus on theory implied no radical shift of method or principle: *über die Form des amerikanischen Geist*, his first book (1928), was already little concerned to be "topical"; and his late views on practical politics, when he has occasion to express them, are broadly consistent with his earlier ones.

9. See Chapter Ten, below, on such "civil theologies". The "subtext", of this passage, written in the 1940s, becomes clear as Voegelin adds, "In retrospect we may wonder whether Gladstone would be so enthusiastic about submissive Churches when the State which they recognize as their master is not the State of England but a National Socialist German or a Communist Russian State, and whether he would be quite so indignant about the insolence of church leaders who pride themselves that they are not unconditionally submissive".

10. In an unpublished paper of 1972, "Notes on 'Civilization and Foreign Affairs'" (Hooqy), Voegelin recounts how, when he came to set up the Institute of Political Science in Munich in 1958, he annoyed many political scientists in Germany by introducing as the required basic courses classical politics and the "thorough knowledge of Western civilization", instead of concentrating on "Hegelian, Marxist and positivist ideologies" and "the political issues of the day".

11. As with virtue, so with vice. Voegelin gives a remarkable analysis of the political nature of "personal" vice in discussing the wrath of Achilles in the *Iliad* (QH II: 83-92). This *ate*, (blinding passion), is not seen just as a factor contributing to the Achaeans' defeat, or one cause among others of social disorder. It is the disorder itself. In the Homeric world, *cholos* (wrath) is both an emotion and a custom; in its authentic expression it resists injustice and restores justice. But the *cholos* of Achilles is simultaneously *ate*, and therefore vicious; and this inner drama determines the external action of the *Iliad*.

12. For a notable contemporary analysis of "heroism", see Becker, 1973.

13. That there are writers who misinterpret Voegelin in this way will be argued in Chapter Nine.

14. For a key passage of the *Gorgias*, see Plato, 1960: 115-17. It remains to be considered how far it is true to attribute the order or disorder of society to the psyche of its members without the reciprocal assertion that consciousness is moulded by societal institutions. See Chapter Seven, below.

15. Voegelin's discussion of Solon hints that "order" will best be ensured by its being entrusted to some wise leader to whom the populace must always defer. Solon's conduct in government seems to have matched his rhetoric: he did not exploit his position for his own advantage, and when pressed to favour one of the competing factions, even left Athens for ten years to escape molestation. He therefore becomes for Voegelin "the prototype of the spiritual statesman" (*Ibid*: 199). The problem glimpsed here seems to me a crux in Voegelin's thought, and will be considered in Chapters Seven and Ten, below.

16. In the case of Bakunin, similarly, "the experience of revolt is an irreducible factor in human existence" (ER: 195-216). Bakunin therefore deems revolt to be the normative social condition and harmony its negation.

17. In the *Republic*, the *doxai* about justice are expressed pungently by Thrasymachus and, more plausibly (because in less extreme form), by Glaucon and Adeimantus (Plato 1955: 63-99). The latter two claim to be voicing popularly held views that do not convince them but nevertheless cause them unease. For Voegelin's discussion of this passage, see OH III: 71-82.

18. The issue has been lucidly stated by the philosopher Aurel Kolnai: principles may tell us "at what points or along what lines of practice moral emphasis . . . is *likely* to arise. The pitfall to be avoided is the assumption, or postulate, that a unitary constructive concept of ethics may *supersede* our direct apprehension of the data of moral experience" (Kolnai, 1977: 119, author's emphasis). For Kolnai, of course, the right to act on one's ethical apprehensions is not exclusive to legislators.

19. In the "History of Political Ideas" Voegelin traces the early development of the Christian theory of law, which is an instructive counterpart to the *Statesman*. In a first position, divine law is decisive; according to Origen, "one may obey the laws of the state only when they agree with the divine law". (This position implies that although state law is flawed, it *potentially* reflects divine law.) In a second position, it is held that there exists a "relative natural law": that is, positive law, though imperfect, is appropriate to the

fallen human state. (According to Augustine, for example, because even tyrants are ordained by God, their authority must be respected. Their very tyranny can be regarded as a punishment for sin, and therefore as a legitimate and remedial mediation of the wrath of God.) As one might expect, since there was no method by which positive civil law could directly be compared with the "absolute" natural law the Church claimed the right to determine when positive law imperfectly represented divine law and when it betrayed it altogether (Hooy).

20. Voegelin has frequently and extensively analyzed the historical occurrences of such symbolisms. cf. NSP: 52-59 on the general problem of cosmological symbolizations, and on their survival into the twentieth century; OH I: 13-110, on the Near Eastern instances; "The Mongol Orders of Submission to European Powers, 1245-1255" (Voegelin, 1941: 378-413), on the self-interpretation of the mediaeval Mongol empires.

21. Thus, in the example given earlier, Gladstone's suspicion of the Roman Catholic Church is intelligible, whether justifiable or not. As a counter-example to this separation of politics and spirit, take Voegelin's account of St. Thomas Aquinas in the "History of Political Ideas". In the *De Regimine Principum* (I, 1) and the *Summa contra Gentiles*, (III, 117), Aquinas makes freedom or servitude the criterion of good or bad government. If the members of the community *cooperate freely* in the enterprise of common existence, the government is good, whatever its institutional character. Even the "good forms" of Aristotle are now regarded as bad, because his theory of the polis presumed the existence of "natural slaves", whereas Christianity recognizes no natural slaves. For Aquinas, of course, freedom, the end of government, is not *absolute*, but is ordained, like the political order itself, towards eternal beatitude.

22. It seems that even Kant, in his famous essay "What is Enlightenment", hypostatizes the freedom he wishes to celebrate. Thus, he applauds the freedom of intellect (carefully sealed off from any social consequences) awarded by the Emperor: "Argue as much as you will, and about what you will, only obey!". The scholar-cleric must divide his life sharply between exercising a "private" function towards his congregation, there "speaking at the dictation of another", and his "unlimited freedom to use his own reason" as a scholar. In each case, any discernment of the nature and responsibilities of freedom is prohibited (Kant, 1986). For a brief essay which Voegelin might approve, because it properly values "freedom" while not using it as a slogan, cf. Parekh, 1988: 25-26, on the question of the universities' obligation to admit socially inflammatory speakers in the name of "freedom of speech".

23. Thus, as used by Mrs Jeanne Kirkpatrick in the 1980s to distinguish allies of the West from its opponents, the distinction between authoritarianism and totalitarianism would need to be evaluated quite differently.

24. For a brief and sardonic account of democracy as the preferred self-description of an "exceedingly heterogeneous class of modern states", cf. Dunn, 1979: 1-27. In Dunn's view, to label a society "democratic" is to say little about how political power is acquired and nothing about how it is exercised.

25. Its validity is not obvious. Lord Hailsham's phrase "elective dictatorship" is much in vogue as I write this study. It is also plausible to suggest that Western industrial societies smack of plutocracy rather than democracy, in that government policies are sometimes determined by non-elected commercial interests, and in that many people would experience their responsibility for government and the government's accountability to them as merely notional.

26. Voegelin's point here is not to be dismissed as proof of his Eurocentric arrogance. It stems from his own experience of the political life of Germany and Austria. Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* gives a scathingly ironical account of the Austrian polity which points up the bizarre irrelevance of the formal constitution (1979, I: 32-33).

27. See Chapter Four above on the Biblical notion of the "fool", and how the presence of the fool influences the course of philosophy and theology.

28. This contrast of the *spoudaios* and the *plethos* underlies both the authority Voegelin attributes to the true philosopher, and the heat of his critique when he sees so-called philosophers touched with folly. cf. "The Oxford Political Philosophers", who swallow whole the "civil theology" of the English state. (Voegelin, 1953b).

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER SIX

1. Voegelin is always alert to visual symbols, as, for instance, to the cosmological symbolism of Solomon's Temple and even of the high priest's robe (OH I: 320); but his writings include no formal account of, say, iconography. In later life, he became deeply interested in palaeolithic art (AM: 83-84), and visited archeological sites in Ireland in 1972. In a letter of June 14, 1972 to Henry Regnery, he wrote "I gave a coffee hour talk to the personnel of the Hoover Institution [a noted stronghold of American conservatism where Voegelin then held the post of Henry Salvatori Distinguished Scholar] on the neolithic cultures of Malta and surroundings; a subject matter of which they had never heard before. They were fascinated and there was a trail of remarks that they had heard something that makes more sense than the continuous yapping against communism" (Hoov).

2. *Israel and Revelation* does almost ignore the Wisdom Literature and, more surprisingly, omits any detailed examination of the prophet Ezekiel. We shall return to this latter omission. Voegelin's major discussions of Christian literature are as follows: NSP: 133-61, on puritanism; OH II: 10-19, on Christian symbolisms of history; OH IV: 13-20, on the Gospel of John; OH IV: 134-37 & 239-71, on St. Paul; Cony: 37-111, in which Christianity is a recurring topic; discussions of Jesus, Francis of Assisi, Luther, Calvin and others in the "History of Political Ideas" (Hoov); the letter of 1953 to Alfred Schutz on Christianity (Opitz & Sebba, 1981: 449-57); the response to Thomas Altizer of 1975; "Immortality: Experience and Symbol" (1967); "History and Gnosis" (1964), a discussion of issues arising from Bultmann's thought; "The Gospel and Culture" (1971); "The Beginning and the Beyond" (ca. 1976, unpublished); "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme" (1981); "Quod Deus Dicitur" (1986). Although the list is extensive and weighty, it nevertheless understates how ubiquitous a point of reference Christianity is for Voegelin.

3. Roland Mushat Frye makes a similar case in his essay "A Literary Perspective for the Criticism of the Gospels" (Miller & Hadidian, 1971: 193-221). He notes Bultmann's axiom that the Bible is to be treated critically as are other kinds of literature. Now, "of all critical principles the most basic is this: the critic is not free to alter, or deny, or ignore the text in order to suit his own presuppositions" (p. 195). But many eminent authorities, including Bultmann, not only "demythologize" but reject or rewrite parts of the scriptural texts in accordance with their theory. Frye treats the Gospels as "dramatic histories" (he defines this genre in n. 28, p. 219 and illustrates it from the Prologue of Henry V),

which are concerned with "veracity" before "historicity". His essay recalls a principle enunciated by his father, Northrop Frye: "if anything historically true is in the Bible, it is there not because it is historically true but for other reasons . . . of spiritual profundity or significance" (N. Frye, 1983: 40).

4. In order to limit the scope of an analysis which could easily occupy an entire thesis, our emphasis will fall heavily on Voegelin's account of the Hebrew rather than the Christian Testament. For general discussions of Voegelin's work on the Scriptures, see the essays by John Kirby, Lynn Clapham and William Thompson in Kirby & Thompson, 1983, and by Bernhard Anderson (in McKnight, 1978). According to his letter of 11 November 1978 to Anderson's editor Stephen McKnight (Hooy), Voegelin found this last article especially interesting.

5. For an historian's discussion of the Exodus, cf. Noth, 1960: 110-21 & 133-38. For the perspective of political theology, cf. Gutiérrez, 1973: 155-60; Fierro, 1977: 140-51; Miranda, 1977: 78-88.

6. The force of this distinction may be illustrated by the way in which certain scriptural injunctions are supported by declarations such as "I am YHVH", or "I am YHVH thy God". Martin Buber writes, "Translated into our language: this is not a moral commandment but a commandment of faith; the declaration means accordingly: I command this to you not as human beings as such, but as *My people*" (1951: 71). The Exodus is the event which constitutes Israel as "My people".

7. For example, speaking in 1966 of Germany under Hitler, Voegelin suggested that persons of spiritual stature had to distance themselves from the "collective insanity" around them, and that this "inner emigration" could, under the pressure of events, "eventually lead to the outer one" (Voegelin, 1985: 22-23). Clearly, he accords priority to the inner decision. We shall shortly return to this use of the term "emigration".

8. We shall, however, have to return to this estimate in this chapter. It is latent throughout the second half of *Israel and Revelation*, as when he writes that "the prophets were torn by the conflict between spiritual universalism and patriotic parochialism that had been inherent from the beginning in the conception of a Chosen People" (p.357). Elsewhere, Voegelin writes that once the insight was gained that the universal order of human existence under God "could not be adequately represented by the constitution of a Chosen People on a definite territory", the Chosen People "broke asunder in the two equally vehement responses of the withdrawal into the shell of Judaism and the explosive expansion of Christianity" (QH II: 10). After making this statement, to be

sure, he goes to some lengths to qualify it (*Ibid*: 10-12), as he discusses the Pauline theology of Judaism in *Romans*.

9. This saying of Augustine (*Enarrationes in Psalmos* 64, 2) meant much to Voegelin and recurs periodically in his work. It confirms for him that "the structure of history is the same as the structure of personal existence" (Voegelin, 1967a: 262). The interior aspect remains for him prior to the historical one, as is seen in his double use of the saying in QH IV, where it articulates "the existential exodus from the pragmatic world of power", and is neighbour to "the philosophers' noetic consciousness of existence in erotic tension" (QH IV: 172, 178). A mystical interpretation of the exodus symbol is not, of course, peculiar to Augustine, and Voegelin is not to be accused of arbitrarily selecting an eccentric source congenial to his interpretative purpose. cf. for example, Origen's Homily, "*De Transitu Jordanis*", remembering that Origen's mystical theology seemed to Voegelin "a high point which has hardly ever been surpassed" (Conv: 105-06, see Chapter Four, above): "When you left the darkness of idolatry and were anxious to reach the understanding of the divine law, you began your exodus from Egypt. When you were numbered among the catechumens and first undertook to obey the laws of the Church, you crossed the Red Sea . . . ." (for Latin text, Origen, 1841: 36-37).

10. Similarly, just as the Exodus begins with God's hearing the cry of Israel, God will also "hear the cry" of any widows, orphans or strangers who are oppressed within Israel (*Exodus* 22: 21-22, 27). Practising such oppression would place Israel itself in the position taken by Pharaoh in *Exodus*, and would invite a righteous divine intervention that might be no less militant than the liberation from Egypt.

11. Thus Moltmann (1967: 305-16), in speaking of an "Exodus Church", accepts the biblical narrative as paradigmatic not just for the confrontation between prophets and kings (cf. above and QH I: 384-85 on the *imitatio Mosis*) but for the life of the Church itself, which is never to become merely a pillar of civil society or a refuge from it.

12. An answer to this further question will be proposed in the next section of this chapter.

13. Voegelin, of course, knows the Torah itself to be more than merely a burdensome "Law" (see QH I: 372-79). As Eichrodt points out, the prophetic interpretation of the covenant concept looks less to Sinai as such than to Yahweh's act of deliverance taken as a whole, which act cannot be misconstrued as Yahweh's "obligatory" adherence to a quasi-legal covenant (Eichrodt, 1961: 61, 52).



14. This section obviously does not pretend to do justice to the richness of QH I: 111-351, but merely seeks to establish one point which is fundamental for the thesis.

15. See Voegelin's remarkable account of the Song of Deborah (QH I: 199-212).

16. The Scriptures emphasize this unproductiveness: to finance the construction Solomon sold twenty cities in Galilee to Hiram of Tyre, cities in such poor condition that "they are called Cabul (no good) to this day" (QH I: 256-59, citing *I Kings* 5: 13-18 & 9: 10-22).

17. Voegelin therefore holds the religion of "the community organized under the Torah" to exemplify what Henri Bergson calls "static religion". As Bergson explains, inward, or "dynamic" religion "needs static religion for its expression and diffusion" (Bergson, 1935: 179), so the latter is not merely an aberration. But static religion is never creative and, unlike dynamic religion, it can plausibly be explained in terms of its function in nourishing social cohesion. Bergson summarizes his exposition by defining static religion as "a defensive reaction of nature against what might be depressing for the individual, and dissolvent for society, in the exercise of intelligence" (*Ibid*: 205). Though Voegelin does not use Bergson's terminology, he repeatedly records his admiration for the book.

18. Interestingly, as John Barton explains (1986: 154-78), the prophets themselves came to be read as Torah (as well as read in other ways). This does not make Voegelin mistaken, since a community of the Torah might possibly read *any* canonical literature in terms of its own perspectives or prejudices. But it makes the notion of "mutual death sentences" seem unduly schematic. It is at this point that Voegelin's omission of any treatment of the *prophet-priest* Ezekiel, potentially a counter-example, seems unfortunate. Ezekiel is a "watchman for the house of Israel" (3; 17-21), one with the task of bringing the concrete historical society back to Yahweh. It is true that he is to warn people individually, since community is henceforth not to override personal responsibility (Buber, 1949: 186-88).

19. In an extended footnote (QH I: 447), Voegelin interprets prophetism as an *attempt* to disengage existential from normative issues, and discusses the motives of the Talmudic resistance to prophetism, most significant of which is the attempt to suppress "pneumatic irrationalism". Voegelin likewise holds irrationalism to be a threat to order, but does not think that dogmatic construction can help.

20. Of course, norms admit of exceptions by definition, so do not necessitate absolutism; and Buber's assertion that the normative articulations of the Torah are *ultimately existential* is well-taken. But these observations do not cancel the need for the distinction itself.
21. The prophets were faced with formidable difficulties, as Voegelin recognizes, for they could find no secure ground from which to attack the social order. To attack foreign cults was easy, if politically risky. To condemn the iniquity of the new upper class "through appeal to a glorified peasant existence, complete with independence, freedom, abundance, and peace" was tricky, for nomad existence would attract no one, and the few traces of it left in the Bible are not all edifying: Voegelin cites the Song of Lamech (*Genesis* 4: 23-24, with "its blood-curdling boasts of revenge" (QH I: 181).
22. As a point of comparison for the passages from *Isaiah*, Voegelin cites the "late historiographic work of the Chronicler". Whereas *II Kings* 3 recounts how the kings of Israel and Judah, after praying to Yahweh at the bidding of Elisha, defeat the Moabites in battle, *II Chronicles* 20 tells how the kings' prayer even relieves them from the need to fight (QH I: 449-50).
23. The *Autobiographical Memoir* tells how Voegelin consulted von Rad about this analysis, and coined the term "metastatic faith" as a concession to von Rad's horror at the thought "that a grandiose spiritual prophet like *Isaiah* should be a magician". As Voegelin adds, "I am not so sure that today I would make this concession" (AM: 69-70).
24. Martin Buber's *The Prophetic Faith* has been of particular help in the development of this analysis. I have also used Bernhard Anderson's essay (McKnight, 1978: 62-100) and several general works as listed in the bibliography: Barton, 1986; Carroll, 1962; de Vaux, 1961; Heschel, 1969 & 1971; Jenni, 1962; Kaiser, 1972 & 1974; North, 1962; von Rad, 1968.
25. The Gospel of Matthew, for example, would on this hypothesis have accomplished a differentiation beyond *Isaiah*: for the commissioning of the disciples in Chapter 10 instructs them to be "wise as serpent and innocent as doves", to be free from anxiety when delivered up to councils, governors and kings, but to flee from persecution. Their trust in God is not to exclude the exercise of human prudence, so that synergy is not repressed.
26. To take one example, the census (*II Samuel*: 24) is sinful, even though enacted at the divine command!

Presumably David's sin is the presumption that he himself can "name" the people and therefore possesses some autonomous authority over them. Instead, they are *God's*.

27. The extravagance of *Isaiah* 30: 17, for example, ("a thousand shall flee at the threat of one") shows clearly that the saying is not meant as an amateur soldier's prediction about the outcome of battle. It states the spiritual principle that military arrogance will always meet with humiliation. Elsewhere, Voegelin acknowledges that the Imperial Psalms express not "a programme of world dominion in practical politics" but "an experience of cosmic order as the source of social order" and have "nothing to do with the size or success of the social unit which uses the language" (*Ibid*: 290-91).

28. Voegelin finds Hosea to be a transitional figure, attempting "to bring the Kingdom of God in the souls of men forth from its theopolitical matrix" (*OH I*: 456).

29. I have challenged only one link in Voegelin's chain of argument, the claim that Ahaz's trust in the prophet would have been metastatic, and that he was therefore justified in securing the realm of expediency against the intrusion of prophetic claims.

30. Our argument suggests that Voegelin regards Jeremiah as a kind of Hebraic equivalent of Plato, who for Voegelin is the source and criterion of order in Athens (*OH III*: 36-39). Voegelin's position in this regard was criticized in Chapter Four, where it was argued that neither Jeremiah nor Plato could be unreservedly regarded as the authoritative source of social order.

31. For this purpose we must rely on allusions, rather than extended arguments. But the allusions are less scattered than they may seem to be. Voegelin uses *The Sermon on the Mount*, especially the Beatitudes, to illuminate his accounts of Plato (*OH III*: 226-28) and Tolstoy (*ER*: 219-21). But this discussion of Plato reworks material from the unpublished "History of Political Ideas"; and *ER*, though published only in 1975, is itself an editor's selection from the same "History". Though Voegelin abandoned the "History" because of its inadequate theoretical framework, he did not repudiate its specific analyses. It must be used cautiously, because it is a comparatively early work and because it was never substantially revised to prepare it for publication. But it is methodologically legitimate to use the "History"'s explicit treatment of the Beatitudes to elucidate subsequent writings which use the "History" as a quarry.

32. To make this criticism is not oneself to invest "the original prophetic discourse" with absolute status. It is clear that the status of the *Sermon on the Mount* is

not that of positive paranesis. But Voegelin dissolves the tension assymmetrically, qualifying the applicability of the original sayings while attributing to some other source a definitive authority.

33. Voegelin gives the analogy of Marx's early writings. The proletariat is "a class which is not a class" because it is not integrated into the hierarchy of privileges. Proletarian misery cannot be remedied by any reform of the present order, but only by emancipation from it. Like the "poor" of the Lukan Beatitudes, the proletariat belongs proleptically to the eschatological realm in which the present world order is dissolved. In this respect, the structure of Marx's eschatological myth (though not its content) is the same as that of the Gospel (Hooy).

We shall take up the theme of eschatology in Chapter Eight: but meanwhile remark that E. P. Sanders (1977) contrasts the Jewish religious mode of "covenantal nomism" with Paul's conception of Christian existence as "participationist eschatology". In other words, the religious consciousness of Christians is formed by the experience of sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ, and of receiving his Spirit, so that the Kingdom of God is in some way present now, is not *only* to be awaited: *a fortiori*, the Lukan Beatitudes are not to be classed as an expression of what Max Weber called *ressentiment*, by which hope is directed entirely to an other-worldly settling of accounts with the privileged of this age.

34. For example, St. Jerome endorses what he already knew as a popular proverb, "The rich person is either an unjust person or the heir of one" (Miranda, 1977: 15). Max Weber (1964: 106-17) characterizes resentment as *one possible component* of the "religious ethic of the disprivileged", one facet of their awareness of their need for salvation. "Other things being equal, classes with high social and economic privilege will scarcely be prone to evolve the idea of salvation. Rather, they assign to religion the primary function of legitimizing their own life pattern and situation in the world" (*Ibid*: 107). The "Woes" therefore embody a wholly sane challenge to the rich (that they do need salvation), and an authoritative resistance to disorder. It should be noted that Weber specifically exempts Jesus from any charge of hostility to the rich (*Ibid*: 115-16).

35. Writing elsewhere of the future prospects of civilization, Voegelin distinguishes various senses of the term: "songeons-nous à une 'civilisation' au sens restreint où l'entend Toynbee, avons-nous en vue l'image polybienne d'un monde en marche vers l'Empire universel, l'image paulinienne d'une humanité de mission vivant dans l'attente de la Parousie, ou faisons nous plutôt allusion

au grand mouvement révolutionnaire qui s'esquisse à la Renaissance pour rendre l'homme maître et possesseur de la Nature?" (Voegelin, 1961a: 135-36). The spiritual potential of civilization varies according to these different usages. Toynbee's usage is non-evaluative, simply because so many various civilizations will exist (as he estimates, about 1743 million!) (OH\_I: 125). For Polybius, civilizations are inherently expansionist. But their rise and fall offers a futile spectacle in which success leads to prosperity, profligacy, loss of morale, corruption and decay; Fortune lends her favours only to withdraw them subsequently (cf. OH\_IV: 117-32). Civilization as conceived by the Enlightenment, the "grande mouvement révolutionnaire", is hostile to the spirit, in particular by rejecting the obligation of "attunement". Of the senses Voegelin mentions, only the Pauline image of civilization promises hospitality to a true spiritual movement.

36. Voegelin gives no example from Tolstoy's works. One vivid example from his fiction is the representation of the judiciary and clergy in *Resurrection*. In Chapters 39-40 of Book I, the liturgy is a corrupt and manipulative charade: the priest does not really believe "that he had indeed swallowed a piece of God - no one could believe this - but he believed it was his duty to believe in this belief". The most persuasive argument, for him as for the deacon, is his income (Tolstoy, 1947: 168-75).

37. Though it was unsought, Voegelin was, of course, poignantly aware of it. See page 1 of this study.

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER SEVEN

1. These statements were made in the Foreword to the 1966 German edition of *Anamnesis*. This Foreword was omitted from the 1978 English edition of *Anamnesis*. I quote the translation made later by Voegelin himself.

2. See *An-E*: 114, where Voegelin gives a table of "levels of being" and of the dimensions of human life "as a person in society and history". The table prohibits all constructions by which the higher levels of being are treated as epiphenomena of the lower levels: as he sums up, "all 'philosophies of history' which hypostatize society or history as an absolute, eclipsing personal existence and its meaning, are false". For a similar conception of such a hierarchy among the levels of being, see Schumacher, 1978.

3. In the *Suppliants*, King Pelasgus of Argos is faced with the choice whether or not to offer refuge to fifty women of Danaüs, who have sought sanctuary with him after fleeing the certain prospect of forced marriage with their father's conquerors. *Nomos* (the law of the country), as well as political expediency, requires them to be abandoned to their pursuers. But the *dike* of Zeus requires the offer of hospitality to the refugees. King and people choose justice together, just as they are willing to bear together the evil of the war that might result from their refusal to surrender the women.

4. cf. the *Republic's* narrative of the decline of a good polis. The decline is inexorable whether the polis should take the form of a "timarchy" (rule by the most ambitious and competitively energetic), an oligarchy, a democracy or a tyranny (Plato, 1955: 312-49). Neither Plato nor Voegelin speculates whether, if a good polis is bound to degenerate, a vicious polis is not bound to improve.

5. For a brief illustration, given by a theologian, of "structural injustice" through the economic structures which trap the poorest countries in their poverty, see Dorr, 1985: 52-73. The trap is "structural" in that no amount of industriousness or frugality practised in the poor countries can free them from it. But such structures are not the only factor in any situation, and do not annul human responsibility. Even among victims competent management is preferable to thriftlessness: even more important, it would show bad faith on the part of the wealthy countries to regard as inflexible the structures they themselves enforce.

6. Of course, if there were "structures" apart from the act of interpretation, no one could point to them anyway,

just as a collocation of stars becomes a "constellation" only in the mind. Indeed the notion of the *longue durée* itself is a construct of the historian's consciousness.

7. His essay of 1951, "Machiavelli's Prince: Background and Formation", for example, argues that Machiavelli's later moralistic detractors have not understood how the thought of his age was influenced by the awareness (one might call it a mental structure) of Italy's vulnerability to conquest by its neighbours, of impending catastrophe. Among his contemporaries some, such as Guicciardini (born 1483) thought Machiavelli an unrealistic optimist. Machiavelli's mythical prince was one who by his own *virtù* could defend Italy against the naked force of others: he reports in his life of Castruccio, "He used to say that man should try everything and not shy away; and that God loves strong men, for, as anyone may see, he always castigates the powerless by means of the powerful" (Voegelin, 1951a: 168).

8. One aspect of this paper, concerning the conditions which are required for democracy's effective functioning, was discussed in Chapter Five, above.

9. Voegelin cites two nineteenth century thinkers, Renan and Sorel, who went so far as to base their hopes for regeneration (of France and of the international labour movement respectively) on the assimilation of the ethos of discipline exemplified by the Prussian army! They were less wise even than Musil's figure of fun, General Stumm von Bordwehr, who is alarmed by a sudden perception that order (or, at least, military order) is good only in moderation: "In the army, where we have the highest degree of order, we also have to be prepared to lay down our lives at any moment. I can't quite explain why. At a certain stage order somehow creates a demand for bloodshed." (Musil, 1979, II: 198).

10. For a limpid account of the relationship between individual and community, cf. Niebuhr, 1945: 35-62. The influential sociological investigation of this relationship by Berger and Luckmann, (1971) is subjected to a philosophical critique by D. Z. Phillips (1979). On the range of connotations and the conflicting evaluations of the concept of community itself, see Plant: 1974: 8-36. cf. also Polanyi, 1973: 203-45; Pannenberg, 1985: 157-90.

11. Reversing "the usual and so deceptively plausible opinion", Hans Jonas argues (1971: 506-07) that the introspective knowledge of one's own mind "is a function of acquaintance with other minds": "Since we begin life as infants (a fact philosophers so easily forget), coming into a world already peopled with adults, the particular 'I' to-be is at first far more the receiver than the giver in this communication. . . . We learn from others what we ourselves can be, can will, and can feel".

12. As Dr. Haddon Willmer has argued in seminar discussion with the present writer, individualism itself is a social phenomenon. It has its own intellectual provenance (its "tradition"), and "individualists" are often eager to persuade others of their case. The reverse proposition needs to be added: at least after the "macroanthropic differentiation" has been made, collectivism is, among other things, an individual mind-set.

13. Quinton's view of political society echoes, knowingly or not, Bossuet's view of religion (ER: 14-18). Bossuet thought that the Reformation demonstrated that "the intellectual powers of the individual cannot substitute for the accumulated wisdom of the collectivity" (the collectivity in this case being the Church, and especially the Fathers of the Church). Voegelin distances himself from Bossuet's position by a typically artful ploy, giving an illustrative quotation in which Trotsky condemns the "individualism" revealed by his petty-bourgeois opponents! We saw in Chapter Four that the very breakthrough to philosophical consciousness is linked, in Voegelin's view, with the attack on hierarchically preserved tradition.

14. Some conservative thinkers, such as Michael Oakeshott, recognize this problematic: cf. Pitkin, 1979: 507.

15. Czeslaw Milosz describes an "historical law, little known, but of considerable moment": the process of decline affects people in ways unknown to them, beneath the threshold of their consciousness. . . . extending to the most intimate of human relations including the erotic . . . with the result that distressed individualists vainly seek the help of psychiatrists trained in the same individualist school (1985: 228).

16. For a discussion, drawing especially on Freud, of the psychology of such "slavishness", cf. Becker, 1973: 127-58. Jung speaks of the "mental contagion", by which individuation is repudiated as one succumbs to the "propensity to imitate" one's neighbours or one's ruler (Jung: 1971: 164-65).

17. Voegelin pushes the argument further. If the wise cannot affect the political society directly, they must reluctantly form an alternative community to affect it indirectly. So, in an important passage, he defends the withdrawal of Socrates from politics as explained in the *Republic* (OH III: 90-91; cf. Plato, 1955: 258).

18. Every "alternation" of consciousness, argue Berger and Luckmann, has its own social matrix. St. Paul's Damascus experience, for instance, admittedly antedates his altered community affiliation. "But this is not the



point. To have a conversion experience is nothing much. The real thing is to be able to take it seriously; to retain a sense of its plausibility." They wittily adapt the tag *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*: "By *salus* we mean here (with due apologies to the theologians . . . ) the empirically successful accomplishment of conversion" (Berger & Luckmann, 1971: 177).

19. For Voegelin's cogent discussion of the forms taken by this irrationalism, cf. 1961c: 278-81.

20. On the "true alternative", cf. also OH III: 321-23. The strategy seems to allow of two conceivable realizations: leaving present rulers in power and "converting" them, or raising to power those who possess "spiritual substance". The "true alternative", which Voegelin admits to be implausible, is not even coherent unless he substantiates the claim that such spiritually mature persons (*spoudaioi*) exist and can be identified and educated for social leadership. When we consider his positive view of responsible politics, we shall have to consider whether his conception of the *spoudaios* bears scrutiny. See Chapter Ten, below.

21. For instance, he acknowledges that faced with the "truly dreadful, confusing, and oppressive state" of the ancient world, the gnostics sought flight whereas the Christian movement strove to practice "loving action" (SPG: 12).

22. "Remembrance", of course, is anamnesis itself. Eugene Webb concisely characterizes Voegelin's use of this term: "a symbol for the recognition that the explicitation of experience is the bringing into consciousness of what had previously been implicitly present but unconscious" (Webb, 1981: 277).

23. The same point is made in NSP: 60, where Voegelin refers to *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* as "the classic masterpiece of contemporary philosophy of society". The enthusiasm of this tribute explains the emphasis given to our analysis here.

24. On Plato's "acceptance" that other human beings are equal only in their distance from him, and on Voegelin's attitude towards that acceptance, see below, Chapter Ten.

25. Germino, 1982: 148-69 makes a contrary judgment. He argues that Bergson's emphasis on transforming the world through action overlooks "the full implication of his own discovery: viz. the eschatological character of the open society symbol" (*Ibid*: 168). For Voegelin, "universal mankind is an eschatological index", not a "society existing in the world" (OH IV: 305). In Chapter Eight we shall claim what Voegelin and Germino must logically contest, that action itself can have an eschatological

character. A methodological limitation of Germino's book (significantly dedicated "To Eric Voegelin, *Magister*") is that Voegelin's conception of openness is taken as an authoritative basis for Germino's criticism of Bergson, without itself being subjected to criticism.

26. To explain this dimension of receptivity, Bergson offers the example of Robinson Crusoe. Even his solitary survival is possible only given the objects he salvaged from the wreck and the skills he had acquired socially. "But a moral contact is still more necessary to him, for he would be soon discouraged if he had nothing else to cope with his incessant difficulties except an individual strength of which he knows the limitations. He draws energy from the society to which he remains attached in spirit" (Bergson, 1935: 160). As Kenneth Burke writes, "the 'personality' involves complex social relationships not wholly reducible to terms of the individual, possible to persons only a part of a social collectivity" (in Kuntz, 1968: 182).

27. Thus, Brueggemann discusses the prophetic critique of the "royal consciousness", which systematically attempts, by propaganda or the suppression of dissent, to convey that "all is well", to numb the awareness of injustice (1978: 44-61). On Jesus's own prophetic consciousness, *Ibid*: 80-95.

28. Moltmann's ecological theology in *God in Creation*, for example, is generated by a sense of worldwide environmental crisis. From this starting point, the book moves to a theology of affirmation and appreciation. For instance, it stresses the need to pass from the understanding of God's creation as *nature* (considered, perhaps, as the suitable object for technological exploitation) to the understanding of nature as *God's creation*, which we must respect (1985: 21).

29. This sweeping suggestion will be explored in Chapter Ten. For a critique of the sociologist Peter Berger, on the analogous grounds that Berger attributes all social roles to "bad faith", cf. Phillips, 1979. Phillips's argument is relevant to our discussion, as is clear in his claim, "what Berger cannot allow is that people do not have common interests in order to have common bonds. He cannot see that their interests are their bonds" (*Ibid*: 105). Phillips therefore regards "common interests" primarily as a sign of a wholesome community of feeling, not as a sign of group "closure". Also in contrast to Berger, Richard Sennett argues that "convention is itself the single most expressive tool of social life" (1977: 37). To place conventions or institutions under systematic suspicion is to eliminate the very possibility of gaining shared societal meanings.

30. Segundo's account (1977) presumes that of Gutiérrez and does not contradict it. See also Lakeland, 1984: 7-20. The political theologian who has best affirmed the positive character of the social world is perhaps Metz. cf. especially, 1968: 51-55. In his later work, however, Metz shifts his emphasis sharply towards critique of that "world" which seeks to negate the potential of faith for societal transformation. This is a prominent theme of *Faith in History and Society*.

31. The Hoover Archive gives no indication where or when this paper was delivered. It is dated "ca. 1939". As a new immigrant and a refugee from Nazism, Voegelin was briefly a regular speaker at public meetings and on local radio stations.

32. On the constitutional factors which originally allowed the Nazis into power, however, cf. Chapter Five, above.

33. One recalls Max Weber's insistence that the Israelite prophets were interested in social injustice only because it constituted a violation of the Mosaic code and thus invited the divine wrath, and that "Jesus was not at all interested in social reform as such" (1964: 50-51). But no one is interested in "social reform as such"; the point is that the enhancement of people's lives is not a matter neatly separable from social reform. Similarly, one could press Weber and ask *why* social injustice violates the divine will.

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER EIGHT

1. Perhaps, for example, some reflections of the elderly Augustine can scarcely be superseded: he recalls the blessings experienced amid "a life so full of many and various evils that it can hardly be called living". If the blessings are so great and of such quality, what can those fuller blessings be like to which such anticipations point? See Brown, 1967: 328-29.
2. Elsewhere, of course, the Pauline expectation finds different expression, as in *I Corinthians* 15, according to which the "imperishing" (*aphtharsia*) will occur "in the twinkling of an eye".
3. See especially Chapter Two, and the section about philosophy in Chapter Four, where classical philosophy, as well as Christian discourse, is argued to be a response to revelation.
4. According to an unpublished paper of 1976, "The Beginning and the Beyond", we can speak of faith when the human response "becomes luminous to itself as a quest for the divine ground and when the quest becomes an act of reflexive questioning" (*Ἠρώω*). The questioning, the ignorance, is not to be dispelled, but neither may the search ever rightly be called off.
5. An analogous twofold account of faith is also found in the Christian Fathers: for example in the fifth catechetical lecture of Cyril of Jerusalem: "The word faith is one word in the vocabulary, but has two separate meanings. For there is one kind of faith that has to do with doctrines, and involves the assent of the mind in respect to such and such a doctrine". (His prime example is the belief "that Jesus Christ is Lord and that God raised him from the dead".) The second kind of faith is "that given by Christ by a particular grace". Cyril quotes *I Corinthians*, 12: 8-9, to show that these gifts empower both noetic illuminations and "activities surpassing human nature" (Cyril, 1955: 122-23).
6. I have in mind especially, J. B. Metz, J. Moltmann and A. Fierro. See Fiorenza 1968a: 145-47. Among others who discuss Bloch's work, Fiorenza himself (1968a, 1968b, 1969) is sympathetic, Kolakowski (1978: 421-49) severe, Stern (1988) pungently hostile.
7. He criticizes psychoanalysis, for instance, for envisaging the preconscious and unconscious as exclusively the *No-Longer-Conscious*: as that which has sunk beneath the threshold of consciousness or has been repressed, and therefore needs to be recovered (1986: 115-16). Not surprisingly, he also attacks Plato (though without

supporting analysis), for whom "all knowing is merely *anamnesis*, a re-remembering of something seen before": a "merely contemplative knowledge necessarily refers to what is closed and what is past, it is helpless against what is present and blind to the future" (*Ibid*: 140, 198, author's emphasis).

8. Bloch's own "anticipatory consciousness" is nourished by his dwelling on an immense range of the European thought of the past. Conversely, the Platonic *anamnesis* has, in a sense, a future dimension, since it is also a search, an incomplete activity, in response to the divine pull.

9. A second area of unease for Bloch's readers may well lie in his confidence that the Soviet Union is the effective carrier of this liberation (1986: 205, but frequently elsewhere). Bloch sees no need to defend his confidence explicitly.

10. Bloch presumably takes his cue from Marx's own vision of the future, which is no less absolute. See Chapter Nine, below.

11. We shall later return to a potentially weightier charge made by Fierro, to see whether it might hold against Voegelin: the charge that a transcendently directed eschatology is an escapism, serving only to inculcate indifference to concrete social programmes (*Ibid*: 283-84; cf. also Segundo, 1977: 126).

12. For another account of the French thinkers discussed in *ER*, cf. Part IV of Manuel & Manuel's immense survey of utopian thought (1979: 413-518), which also offers a very full bibliography. A discussion from a Christian standpoint, well known to Voegelin (cf. *SPG*: v) is that of Henri de Lubac, 1949. See also Passmore, 1970.

13. See Voegelin's wide-ranging analysis (*ER*: 35-73). There also arises the question of the legislators' own passions, how it might be ensured that they will be subject to "reason" and free from partisanship. In fact, Helvétius recognized that his own society's failure to realize the public good was a threat to his theory, since the theory aspires to a universal validity: but he blamed the fanatics who obstructed popular enlightenment in order to guard their sectional interests. Progress was *only now* feasible, he claimed, because the age of fanaticism had given way to the age of reason. The argument is either self-defeating or circular, depending on whether or not the arrival of the age of reason is held to abolish the dominance of the *amour de soi*, of passionate self-interest.

14. In particular Voegelin attributes such a methodological abuse to Comte (*ER*: 113-18). It is noteworthy

that utopian literary fiction often takes the same step. For example, as David Lodge notes, it tends to concentrate on the creation of a plausible external framework, with character and motive subordinate, since progress can less plausibly be attributed to them - but see note 15. Thus, in *A Modern Utopia*, H. G. Wells celebrates the technology of fast and comfortable travel, without speculating about its possible drawbacks. A non-utopian thinker, John Ruskin, on the contrary, had protested "that the Wye valley was being desecrated by a railway viaduct in order that a Buxton fool might find himself in Bakewell and a Bakewell fool in Buxton at the end of twelve minutes" (Lodge: 1986: 230-35).

15. For a classic statement of meliorism by a very different thinker than Turgot (one who insists, for example, that "all public ends look vague and quixotic beside private ones"), see Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay on "Politics". Emerson holds "thought" and "character" to be the decisive factors of politics: "The history of the State sketches in coarse outline the progress of thought, and follows at a distance the delicacy of culture and of aspiration. . . . We think our civilization near its meridian, but we are yet only at the cock-crowing and the morning star. In our barborous society the influence of character is in its infancy. As a political power, as the rightful lord who is to tumble all rulers from their chairs, its presence is hardly yet suspected." (Emerson, 1906: 319, 312, 321.)

16. Naturally, believers in progress were not necessarily blind to evil. For Turgot, especially, progress served as a theodicy, through which alone a providential character could be attributed to a history soaked in suffering (Manuel & Manuel, 1979: 476-90).

17. As an example of Condorcet's "atrocities of vulgarization", Voegelin gives a lengthy and chilling extract from the *Esquisse* (ER: 127). One may add that Condorcet's call for an authoritative Directorate itself implies a subliminal recognition that "progress" might well, unless controlled, defeat itself and lead to the disintegration of the social order. Voegelin wryly notes the indignation which tends to surface as soon as people suspect that progress is not automatic, expressed in such remarks as "It is outrageous that such things should happen in the twentieth century" (ER: 110).

18. For an illuminating poetic reflection on this theme, cf. W. H. Auden's "The Shield of Achilles". At first sight, the appalling future glimpsed in the shield suggests an historical pessimism of the kind we shall consider in the next section: but this future is the outgrowth of the specific folly of expecting a harmonious world to be the fruit of the grim expertise of Achilles and the armourer. The devastation exacts retribution for

the goddess's pursuit, on her son's behalf, of both unique military prowess and unique immunity from injury.

19. Thus: Huxley's *Ape and Essence* portrays the consequences of an insufficiency of both power and benevolence; Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* explores the combination of effective power with malevolence; and in Huxley's *Brave New World*, the rulers embody both power and benevolence. But all are dystopias.

20. An emphasis on historical decline is compatible with utopianism: One's utopia simply becomes some variant of a past "Golden Age". In a review article about the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, for instance, John Updike suggests that the contrast elaborated by Lévi-Strauss between the primitive societies he so admires and our own society relies on a Marxist analysis, with the difference that the ideal society *pre-dates* class divisions, technology, etc. (Updike, 1983: 668-69). Manuel & Manuel distinguish this "Edenic" form of utopianism from the "Promethean" form (1979: 539).

21. Two of the "Outlandish Proverbs" collected by George Herbert, taken together, put the matter pithily: "I wept when I was borne, and every day shewes why."; "He that hath no ill fortune is troubled with good.". And yet, in the words of a third, "Hope is the poore man's bread." (Herbert, 1945: 327, 333, 337 respectively). Thus, whereas Camus commends a grim but supposedly satisfying indifference to circumstances, the proverbs' tonality is subtly different. Happiness is not to be found in external circumstances themselves, so one needs to cultivate a certain detachment. But the proverbs do not claim that impassivity suffices for happiness.

22. Similarly, Schönberg is said to have described his choral work *Friede auf Erden* as "a delusion for mixed choir", although the concept of "peace on earth" is no more a delusion than is that of an unmitigated "discord on earth". The *experience* of such "anti-optimism", of course, is undeniable, so long as it is not projected into a theory. As Saul Bellow's Herzog exclaims, "Justice! Look who wants justice! Most of mankind has lived and died without - totally without it. People by the billions and for ages, sweated, gypped, enslaved, suffocated, bled to death, buried with no more justice than cattle. But Moses E. Herzog, at the top of his lungs, bellowing with pain and anger, has to have justice." (Bellow, 1965: 227)

23. One might contrast the position of Reinhold Niebuhr, for whom eternity stands both "at the end of time" and "over time" (as "the ultimate source and power of all derived and dependent existence"). Present events, then, partake of eternity (1943: 309-12).

24. For example, Frank Kermode (1967: 3-31) discusses the device of literary narrative known as "peripeteia". All narratives proceed to an end, but the more sophisticated the narrative, the more devices are found to defer, tease, or "disconfirm" the reader's expectations, so as to make the final consonance more satisfying. Peripeteia would naturally be futile for a reader with no expectations whatever; but expectations are there to be temporarily cheated. By analogy, it is not incoherent to envisage the whole of history as a peripeteia, to be resolved only in the *parousia*: in that case, to expect one's hopes to be satisfied within history would be a simple category mistake.

For a classic literary instance of what might be termed "moralistic Sisyphism", cf. Samuel Johnson's poem, "The Vanity of Human Wishes", especially the concluding section.

25. The illustration shows Tillich's argument to be dubious, since one would have said that "breadth and refinement" were qualitative factors: and if quantity is contrasted with quality *within the realm of morality*, it is hard to see why quantitative increase denotes progress at all. As Philip Larkin's poem "Dockery and Son" has it (in a very different context), "Why did he think adding meant increase?/ To me it was dilution" (1964: 38).

26. An example will clarify the issue. Anthony Storr has noted a plausible suggestion of Ernest Gellner, that the release from material insecurity enjoyed by modern affluent societies has merely displaced the primary location of their suffering to the realm of personal relationships (Storr, 1988: 13-14). For political ethics, there is the related further problem that many relevant goods are "positional" (to use the term coined by Fred Hirsch in *The Social Limits to Growth*). That is, some goods can in logic only be enjoyed by excluding other people from sharing them. "Numbered lithographs, for instance, are each priced higher the fewer of them there are, since they are valued partly because they are scarce. Everyone could own a mere print but not everyone can enjoy a numbered guarantee that not everyone has one" (Hollis, 1985: 98). Perhaps power is similarly rationed, so that, as some people newly gain power, others newly become victims.

27. Voegelin acknowledges that Plato's emphasis on the structure of reality is similarly prone to distortion when severed from such a meditative process as Plato's own: as, for example, when it is regarded as ratifying a fixed definition of human nature (OH IV: 253).

28. H. G. Wells likewise insisted that his "Modern Utopia" was not static, but was an ascent through stages



of perfection. As John Passmore writes, "Perfection is dead, long live perfectibility!" (1970: 169).

29. As Keck neatly expresses the matter, "The content of that transformed world cannot be discerned now since every description is but the projected obverse of the known" (1972: 222).

30. On this distinction, cf. Hastings, "Hope and Optimism" (1986: esp. 114-15).

31. As Karl Rahner writes, "the history of salvation is coexistent with the whole history of the human race (which is not to say identical, for in this single history there is also guilt and the rejection of God, and hence the opposite of salvation)" (1978: 142).

32. Voegelin elsewhere draws on the work of Jacob Burckhardt to make a similar point (OH IV; 192-97).

33. Dumas (1978: 38-42) notes that the Bible does not echo the Greek philosophers' myths of decline. Its many stories of decline fit into a larger pattern, in which decay tends to have the sequel of regeneration and bitterness of reconciliation.

34. For a brief and elegant comparison of some different understandings of "human nature", cf. Jonas, 1971. For Jonas himself, human nature is "possibility", rather than determinate fact, and he writes of the "transcending trait of our nature by which we are always indefinitely more than our present being" (*Ibid*: 511). On the type of ethical theory which derives from the assumption that the invariant essence of human nature is accessible to reason, cf. Mahoney, 1987: 72-83.

35. In Chapter Four, we cited Voegelin's own insistence that the human being is no less a *zoon politikon* and a *zoon historikon* than a *zoon noetikon*: cf. AN-E: 91-92.

36. A taped conversation cannot be counted as a definitive statement. But he had earlier expressed the conviction that what he then termed "gnosticism" was self-defeating and must "explode" (NSP: 164-66) - though there, too, he noted that explosions could be dangerous. The ambivalence to which I refer derives from his insistence that any new insight tends in its turn to spawn a new orthodoxy (AM: 110-11), so that the socially liberating force of the insight is inexorably betrayed. Logically, this insistence ought to inhibit his own confidence about the death of ideologies, since it is unlikely that unreason will fail to find new forms.

37. It would also rule out the position we argued for in Chapter Seven, that society can nourish, as well as threaten, the individual's noetic life.

38. See Metz's discussion of the relationship between "redemption" and "emancipation" (1980: 119-35).

39. In *The Idea of a Universal History*, Kant asserted that it was morally necessary to believe in human perfectability, since otherwise our moral effort would be weakened: perfectability is therefore a "regulative idea". We are making the stronger claim that hope expresses a truth as well as a duty. Thus, Macquarrie rightly discusses hope in its emotional, volitional and cognitive aspects (1978: 4-15). Heraclitus had already distinguished faith, love, and hope as *sources of knowledge* (An-E: 184).

40. Ruether argues that, whereas Judaism looked to a messianic era on earth followed by the "end of the world", Christianity wrongly appropriated the messianic era to Christendom itself: the only further conceivable fulfilment was "the otherworldly hope of the soul after death". Thus, "total hope" was banished to "the apocalyptic religions of the poor and the oppressed", who retained the urgent aspiration for some historical vindication against the holders of power (*Ibid*: 238).

41. Ruether admits that she does not expect "contemporary radicals" to welcome the historical perspective she provides, because their ecstatic commitment naturally rules out a sober sense of historical probability.

42. The Sisyphist belief that history under the shadow of the end has the character of "peripeteia" remains logically unfalsifiable. But history's "direction" would in that case be predominantly a "detour", which I suspect is incompatible with the Pauline experience affirmed by Voegelin. For some stimulating remarks on the choice of perspective according to which evil is either the demonstration of cosmic absurdity or is believed to have a meaning because it will eventually be absorbed into a greater good, cf. Kolakowski, 1982: 34-39, 210-15.

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER NINE

1. As background texts for this section, the following have proved useful: Buber, 1958; Kolakowski, 1978; Lash, 1981; Lichtheim, 1975; McGovern, 1987; McLellan, 1970. For Marx's ethical theories, see Kain, 1988; Kamenka, 1969; Lukes, 1985; MacIntyre, 1967: 199-214; Stojanovic, 1988. On Marx's 1850 Address to the Communist League, see Avineri, 1968, 195-97; Lichtheim, 1964: 122-29; Nicolaievski & Maenchen-Helfen, 1973: 211-40; Wolfe, 1967: 151-58. None of these authors mentions Voegelin.
2. See Weber 1958: 90-92 on the "Protestant Ethic" (first published 1904-05). Voegelin remarks in 1936 that he likes to tease his communist students by assuring them that their opinions are the product of a passion for justice rather than of their class location and material interests (1936b: 598).
3. Marx's Inaugural Address to the First International (1864) uses official reports and statistics to refute the theory that has come to be called "trickle-down" (Marx, 1977: 531-37). Contrary to earlier predictions, the "intoxicating epoch of economical progress" in Europe had led to increasing pauperization. Marx himself predicts that "every fresh development of the productive powers of labour must tend to deepen social contrasts and point social antagonisms" (*Ibid*: 534).
4. In speaking of "modern industrial society", Voegelin attributes alienation to industrialism as such. Marx specifically indicts *capitalism* as the "Paris Manuscripts" have it, "the essential connection of private property, selfishness, the separation of labour, capital, and landed property, of exchange and competition, of the value and degradation of man, of monopoly and competition", and "the connection of all this alienation with the money system" (Marx, 1977: 78). Thirty years later, in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875), Marx's position is unchanged (*Ibid*: 569).
5. In slightly varied forms Voegelin made this charge frequently, over a long period (e.g. *NSP*: 25; *AM*: 49; *An-E*, 102, in a section dating from 1974).
6. It is noteworthy that Voegelin's expositors have never seriously questioned the quality of his arguments against Marx. Germino (1982: 127) has qualms about Voegelin's habit of deducing spiritual disease from bad arguments, and would prefer Voegelin to distinguish the sin from the sinner. But he does not doubt Marx's sin, or Voegelin's uncovering of it. Sandoz (1981: 27-29) merely applauds Voegelin and attributes his "hard words" to the need to

serve truth in "unmistakeable language": having experienced the consequences of ideology, Voegelin attacks it with "an Aeschylan wisdom born of suffering". In fact, I have not seen in any secondary literature a properly critical examination of Voegelin's attack on Marx.

7. This topic is a standard one among students of Marx, especially "revisionists": see, for example, Kolakowski, 1978: 418-20, McGovern, 1987: 49-89, Lichtheim 1970: 271-72.

8. Parousiasm is a mode of Gnosticism (SPG: 48-49). For an account of Marx's antecedents in this respect, cf. Voegelin's discussion of left-wing Puritanism (NSP: 144-52). He writes, their "scriptural camouflage cannot veil the drawing of God into man. The [Puritan] Saint is a Gnostic who will not leave the transfiguration of the world to the grace of God beyond history, but will do the work of God himself, right here and now, in history": Voegelin counts Marx and Engels among later "gnostic revolutionaries" (*Ibid*: 147-48).

9. For a brief discussion, cf. Levy, 1981: 87-101.

10. Indeed, capitalism might simply take new forms to cope with new pressures or contradictions, rather as, according to Holland & Henriot, industrial capitalism has already successfully modulated through three phases: (1) Laissez-Faire; (2) Social Welfare; (3) National Security (1983: 64-86).

11. To give an example from Marx which is not mentioned by Voegelin: in *The German Ideology* Marx argues that it is "empirically established" that the communist revolution, in overthrowing "the existing state of society" will accomplish "the liberation of each single individual" (Marx, 1977: 171). One might ask what the phrase "empirically established" could possibly mean.

12. For an autobiographically based reflection on that kind of experienced need for "faith", both among Marxists and anti-Marxists, which may really be "a need for a simplified outlook on life", cf. Milosz, 1988: 108-27, especially 113-15.

13. Writing from a stance of "ethical socialism", John Milbank argues that rejecting Marxism would allow a *more effective* critique of capitalism: "For Christian socialism, unlike Marxism, capitalism did not appear as a partial, contradictory development of freedom - instead it was denounced as a pseudo-progress and a mere contingency, whose rise was the shame of Christendom" (1988: 5). By telling "a theoretical story in which history gradually unravels a condition of absolutely spontaneous peace and freedom", Marxism neglects the truth that "genuine political freedom for the individual

involves a sympathetic taking into account of the endless demands of others", and avoids such central practical questions as "what *kinds* of property are allowable under what conditions" (*Ibid*: 7-8).

14. See ER: 296-98. My own citations are taken from McLellan's selection (Marx, 1977: 277-85), which gives the text entire.

15. The terms are crude but convenient, and their inadequacy as descriptive of particular theoretical positions will not affect our argument.

16. The two streams are sometimes called respectively "neo-liberalism" and "neo-conservatism": the prefix is appropriate because they are conscious rejections of worldviews, especially socialism, which arose over against earlier liberal and conservative movements (Steinfels 1981: 39). As late as 1987, when one might think that the New Right had become a dominant force in Britain, Barry treats it instead as a challenge to the post-war consensus, "the critique of a prevailing intellectual fashion" (1987: 190; cf. also 1-22). See also Hoover & Plant, 1989: 76-90.

17. It is true that Gray specifies a positive content for liberalism. This content is not rendered vacuous even if it be true, as Voegelin claims, that the positive ideas emerged by negating other ideas.

18. For analogous comments on religious and scientific liberalism, not directly relevant to our argument, see Voegelin, 1974b: 517-519.

19. I have only gradually become aware of these circumstances.

20. The documents I cite in connection with this incident, as with other correspondence on which I rely heavily in this chapter, may be found in the Voegelin Archive at the Hoover Institution.

21. As Voegelin was later informed off the record, the essay was written by *Time's* Senior Editor, Max Ways, who, in the same year reviewed Kirk's *The Conservative Mind*, devoting to it the whole of *Time's* book section (Nash, 1976: 74).

22. V. M. Byrnes (1973) argues that Voegelin's seeming fixation on Gnosticism belongs to a transitional phase in the development of his theory of consciousness. Gnosticism is scarcely mentioned in *Order and History* and *Anamnesis*. By the time of "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme" (1981) Voegelin's emphasis is firmly on "the positive effort to clarify the meaning of existential consciousness" (1981: 270) of which Gnosticism (whether

ancient or modern) is only one possible deformation. Some years later, Voegelin confessed that he had earlier placed too much emphasis on Gnosticism, in effect corroborating Byrnes's argument (Cony: 149).

23. It must in fairness be added that some other contributors, such as Michael Oakeshott and Hannah Arendt, are by no means "Cold Warriors".

24. In the French Revolution, on the contrary, "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 the conservative half that tried, and tries, to salvage the Christian tradition" (NSP: 188). The sentence dooms French Christians to perennial conservatism!

25. Since Voegelin appears here at his most dislikeable, it ought to be noted again that AM is the typescript of a series of taped interviews, and is not a carefully revised written work.

26. For Voegelin's discussion of Husserl, cf. An-E: 9-12, 14-35.

27. Levy refers to Hayek's book, *The Mirage of Social Justice*. For a summary of Hayek's position, cf. Barry, 1979: 137-43; on its influence in British politics, cf. Hoover & Plant, 1989: 42-75. For Hayek's general objections to the adjective "social", see his essay of 1982, which happens to appear in *Freedom and Serfdom*, edited by Hunold (1961), to which we have referred.

28. In Chapter Five I discussed Voegelin's demonstration of how the symbol "justice" emerges in Greek thought precisely as a political symbol, not as a function of individual morality.

29. What is implied by "taken-for-granted" reality may also be seen in two of Russell Kirk's "six canons of conservative thought" (1978: 7-8). What Kirk wishes to be taken for granted includes "tradition, sound prejudice, and old prescription" (which are "checks upon both man's anarchic impulse and upon the innovator's lust for power"); and "orders and classes, as against the notion of a 'classless society'". Kirk regards class structures as "natural distinctions", not to be effaced. By maintaining them, conservatives are "the party of order". These canons clearly drift far from Voegelin's conception of noetic life. (Kirk's book was published by Henry Regnery's "Gateway" imprint.)

30. For a pungent expression of Voegelin's view of ecclesiastical fundamentalism, see his letter to Alfred Schutz (Opitz & Sebba, 1981: 456-57). In a letter of March 1981 to Michael Berheide, Voegelin remarks that

though conservatives find support in his work, some of them have criticized his analysis of Christian writings: this is understandable "because certain deformations in the ideological sphere result from fundamentalist deformations in the theological sphere - and the deformations in the theological sphere are cherished as part of the 'tradition'" (Hooq). For an essay in which Schall tries to legitimate his own ideological anti-Marxism by appealing to Voegelin's critique of *any* ideology, see "Secularizing Salvation" (1989).

31. Similarly, Voegelin writes of the tension in Israel between the word of God that had been "mummified in the sacred text", and the word of God as spoken through the prophets: "One can imagine how horrified Jeremiah must have been when he saw conformity of action to the letter of the law supersede the obedience of the heart to the spirit of God" (OH I: 367).

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER TEN

1. See, especially, Chapter Four, for his polarizing of philosophers and philodoxers, according to which the two terms refer not to "ideal types" but to actual persons: so that Plato, and even Voegelin himself, appear as representatives of noetic truth and not as thinkers who are themselves subject to the metaxic tension between truth and falsehood. Also, see Chapter Four on the terminology with which he contrasts the Christian movement and classical philosophy; and Chapter Nine for his attack on Marx.
2. For brief critical studies of Kraus, cf. Heller, 1984, and Stern, 1986.
3. Voegelin appears to have in mind the chapter of *Cancer Ward* entitled "Idols of the Market Place" (Solzhenitsyn, 1971: 460-77). "Idols" in that chapter are those errors of others which one voluntarily accepts even though they deny reason and one's own experience.
4. As prime examples of non-experiential language, Voegelin cites with relish some of the more blatant reductionisms discussed by Sorokin (1958): that, for example, by which the human mind is defined as "an organism's selection of particular kinds of material operations to perform upon particular kinds of matter-energy in order to minimize the organism's own probable work"; and that by which consciousness is defined as "an electron-proton aggregation" (Hooy). On "pneumopathology", cf. *An-E*: 102-03.
5. At the time of this brave lecture, Heidegger's complicity with the Nazis was a topic usually treated with nervous discretion.
6. That the phrases lose their potency in translation helps to make Voegelin's point: respectively, they may be rendered "the presence of that which is present", "the thinging of the thing", "the negation of the nothing", and "the pointing sign of the pointing implement".
7. For a recent example of such a critique of language, see Jonathan Raban, *God, Man and Mrs. Thatcher*, 1989. Recall the case, quoted in Chapter Three above, of Milan Kundera's Czech protagonist, Sabina. She even refuses to shout slogans (about "Soviet Imperialism") with which she sympathizes, because of her experience of the basic and pervasive political evil of *sloganizing itself*.
8. In Book I of Browning's *The Ring and the Book*, the narrator mentions the difficulty of assessing the truth about events of which the reports are contradictory:



"How else know we save by worth of word?". On the other hand, to assess the "worth of word", one must judge the credibility of the speaker - which cannot be done without evaluating the quality of the testimony. It is this same circularity, this reciprocity between language and experience, which any jury has to penetrate.

9. Exemplary cases of substantive communication would be Plato's programme of education through "persuasion" and Aeschylus's dramatic representation of the tragic dimensions of political choice.

10. Voegelin told in the lecture how in Vienna, during the rule of Hitler, one could readily buy periodicals from Switzerland or elsewhere. But no Nazi would buy foreign journals which might report what the Nazis preferred to ignore. It is possible, therefore, for writers and readers to collude in a "willed ignorance". That is, one first intuits certain truths in order then to refuse to receive them fully or divulge them.

11. Voegelin admits that Plato's position is ambiguous in more than one respect. He *did* withdraw from public life to found the Academy, but only because he thought that in this way he could better influence political society in the long term. Again, in the *Statesman*, Plato (who "is not a Christian saint") allowed "the admixture of a heavy dose of violence to the Persuasion of the royal ruler" (OH III: 225-26, OH II: 364). See also Voegelin, 1951a).

12. Voegelin's acceptance of this new truth attained by Christianity decisively separates him from two thinkers who were almost his contemporaries and might seem to have much in common with him. For Leo Strauss, religion is a delusion which true philosophers will see through. But because religious beliefs promote the masses' docility towards rulers, philosophers will keep their scepticism to themselves. On Strauss, see the review article by S. Holmes, 1989. Like both Voegelin and Strauss, the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset thinks in terms of select minorities who decisively affect the quality of social life. But for Ortega, it is the "biological mission" of the masses to be "docile", accepting the leadership of "exemplary men" who alone possess "the power of organic creation". On Ortega y Gasset, see the review article by R. Carr, 1989.

Against Strauss, Voegelin holds, firstly, that scepticism belongs to sophists, not philosophers: secondly, that everyone has the duty to seek the truth that philosophers seek. Against Ortega, Voegelin holds that such docility is no longer permissible, for in the Christian differentiation *everyone* is called to the life of the "minority". Ortega's "docility" would, incidentally, disable the "exemplary men" themselves, who would lose contact with society at large.

13. For a fuller account, see Cooper, 1983, especially pages 282-86.
14. Discussing Weber's theory of bureaucracy, Alasdair MacIntyre speaks of the rise of "managerial expertise", which combines "the aspiration to value neutrality and the claim to manipulative power" (1987: 86).
15. See, especially, Voegelin's analysis of Thucydides (OH II: 349-73). The progressive Athens, full of "civilizational energy", inevitably expands at the expense of its culpably passive neighbours, whose inaction invites conquest. But equally, Athens's brutality and transgressions of justice already contains the seeds of its subsequent political disaster.
16. By "the Church" Voegelin here means principally the Roman Catholic Church. He uses the term "clerical" idiosyncratically, opposing it to "secular" rather than to "lay". Therefore, "clericalism" does not bear the pejorative sense of "episcopal directives in politics" (Hooy) but signifies the Church's attempt to use its influence in politics by any means; such as forming political groupings of Christian inspiration.
17. The failure is of the same sort, presumably, as the paradigmatic failure of Isaiah, faced with Ahaz. Isaiah's "metastatic faith" prevented his making the necessary accommodation to civilizational necessity, so ensuring his irrelevance. See Chapter Six.
18. Voegelin does not, of course, think the Church to be alone in failing to integrate spirit with power and practical good sense. We saw in Chapter Nine that he accused the West of sharing "Gnostic dream assumptions" by creating a power vacuum to its own disadvantage after the Second World War; its aspirations to peace were vitiated, firstly by a lack of political realism and secondly by the repudiation of power and its obligations.
19. For example, the vindictiveness which exacted the war reparations from Germany could be regarded as a modern analogue of the *ate*, the blinding passion, of Achilles to which we referred in Chapter Five).
20. Voegelin gives striking examples (NSP: 55-59, 62-63).
21. Voegelin does not mean that imperialism is a national characteristic fixed for ever. He is precisely opposing such static conceptions; and, in any case, it would be implausible to posit imperial consciousness of, say, twentieth century Sweden. But if the imperial heritage remains alive, renewed material power must be expected to reactivate it. This emphasis on structure rather than personality anticipates the characteristic emphases of

the *Annales* school of historians discussed in Chapter Seven. It also suggests that practical politics cannot afford to be oblivious to what Voegelin calls, in connection with Thucydides, the "order of necessity". For some reflections on this latter theme, with a sketch of the historical events referred to by Voegelin, see the lecture by Klaus Scholder, "Fate and Guilt in History" (Scholder, 1989: 19-34)

22. This is for Voegelin a classic case of how the opponents of destructive ideology failed to "catch on" to the spiritual realities of politics because of their overvaluation of external forms. See Chapter Five on the policy of Dollfuss, and on Hitler's manipulation of "democratic" structures.

23. See Voegelin's essay "World-Empire and the Unity of Mankind" (1962), and Geoffrey Barraclough's helpful discussion (1981) with its many references to OH IV. The potential of Voegelin's type of political analysis is suggested by his prescient comment of 1973: "It is unimaginable that, for instance, a Soviet empire can permanently maintain itself in the present form against the ethnic cultures of the non-Russian people who are more than fifty per cent of the population" (AM: 112).

24. For an analogous instance, see Dennis P. McCann's argument that Reinhold Niehuhr's "Christian realism" shirked the problems of American hegemony (1981: 106-21).

25. cf. the contrast drawn by Gutiérrez between development (or "developmentalism"), which supposes a prevailing element of continuity in socio-economic structures, and liberation (1973: 21-42, 81-99).

26. See our account, in Chapter Seven, of the conservatism discussed by Quinton. The Aristotelian model by which the needy are disqualified from participation in the polis (since competent participation requires a certain leisure and a freedom from urgent necessity) is a prominent influence on the conservatism of Burke and Oakeshott. cf. Pitkin, 1979: 510-15. As we have seen, Voegelin thinks this model is ruled out by Christianity. For a comically polemical use of the organic metaphor, see the sequence of speeches in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (I, 1), in which Menenius Agrippa defends the senate's privileges before a rebellious populace. The senate, "cupboarding the viand", "never bearing/Like labour with the rest", is the stomach, acting in the service of the common people, "the great toe of this assembly". On the political application of the concept of community, see Plant, Lesser & Taylor-Gooby, 1980: 204-46.

27. Perry Anderson neatly contrasts the "traditional" and "radical" images of community, when he writes of a possible shift "from the seamless sharing of customary

values to a heightening of mutual vulnerability, which accepts conflict as itself a positive value" (1989: 37).

28. Holland and Henriot emphasize that "revolution" does not meet their criteria for such transformation (1983: 40). Perhaps they would endorse the dictum of Camus, that revolution "is a movement which describes a complete circle, which leads from one form of government to another after a total transition" (1971: 76-77).

29. Even if it were true that the proposed new structures conformed to the cultures of those nations who most suffer from the present system, Holland and Henriot are proposing radical *global* changes, which would therefore need also to be negotiated in the dominant powers.

30. See Wogaman, 1988: 94-98, on such U.S.A. "liberal" theologians as John Coleman, who combine a radical analysis with a reformist or incrementalist strategy.

31. Such usage tends to provoke its own backlash: in the U.S.A., during the 1988 Presidential election, both "liberal" and "radical" were used as derogatory terms, which even Democrat candidates felt obliged to disavow.

32. In fact, the shared assessment of a tradition's status is itself part of that tradition. "Every time I select a programme on the radio I modify a little the balance of current cultural valuations. . . . Indeed, whenever I submit to a current consensus, I inevitably modify its teaching; for I submit to what I myself think it teaches and by joining the consensus on these terms I affect its content". Conversely, all dissenters partially submit to the existing consensus, and implicitly claim social authority for themselves as teachers (Polanyi, 1973: 208-09).

33. Voegelin's claim explains the extensive treatment given to classical philosophy in this key section. Aristotle's observations on desire are "christianized" by St. Augustine in a famous passage of Book Ten of the *Confessions* (Augustine, 1961: 228-30).

34. Aristotle's principle "that the science of ethics can be cultivated only by men whose character is sufficiently mature to serve as an instrument of cognition" is incipiently present in Hesiod (*QH II*: 140). An analogous principle is that of *adaequatio*: that all realities are perceived according to the capacity of the knower, and therefore that an inadequate understanding will construct an impoverished version of reality (cf. Schumacher, 1978: 50-73. Naturally, it follows that one *spoudaios* can only be recognized by others.

35. Plato uses the term *dikaiosune* not to denote the specifically ethical virtue of "justice", but with an

equivalent force as Aristotle uses *phronesis*. For wisdom itself "is of no avail unless a virtue higher than wisdom sees to it that wisdom will indeed prevail in the soul over the passions. That higher virtue is *dikaiosune*" (QH III: 111). Another equivalent is the Christian virtue of *prudentia*. In one of his letters to Schutz Voegelin writes: *Prudentia* is the first of the ethical virtues, and "has absorbed into its ethical knowledge the knowledge that stems from the experiences of transcendence" (Opitz & Sebba, 1981: 451). On this view any ethics based, say, on strictly utilitarian considerations cannot encompass the virtues that are opened up by experiences of transcendence.

36. See the anecdote recounted by Willmer, 1982: 30. For a discussion of the question whether the poor have a privileged stance in respect of the Gospel, see Hellwig, 1983, especially page 145. Such insights of *phronesis* can be non-conceptual: "It is said that American Indians, when trying to discover whether a stranger was a friend or an enemy, used to ignore his words and listen to his tone of voice" (Keightley, 1986: 136).

37. One must again stress that the word "masses" is not for Voegelin an index of social class or status. When he insists, in his "Autobiographical Statement", that "stupidity" is "a relevant social factor", the "mass of passionately directed people" includes intellectuals and *de facto* political leaders (Lawrence, 1984: 114-15).

38. But see QH III: 265, where Voegelin discusses the "Nocturnal Council", the spiritual court proposed in the *Laws*. The Council has the power of life and death over dissidents. It "looked sinister indeed" as long as one envisaged it as the alternative to "freedom of the spirit". But Plato was influenced by his experience of "the tyranny of the rabble and the murder of Socrates". Voegelin does not think such a court a feasible pragmatic response to the "problems of the age"; "but we have lost our illusion that 'freedom' will lead without fail to a state of society that would deserve the name of order".

39. David Brandon wittily challenges those who seek to "change society" on the assumption that they themselves need not change: "The currently popular term 'catalyst' is ironically and unintentionally appropriate as it means strictly 'an agent in an effect produced by a substance that *without undergoing change itself* aids a chemical change in other bodies'" (1976: 81).

40. In the case of Nietzsche, however, Voegelin recognizes that a thinker cannot be blamed for subsequent misuse of his work: a sensitive philosopher "will be able to chart the course of social disintegration for a considerable time ahead": but to think Nietzsche caused the disintegration he diagnosed would betray the

"fantastic assumption" that a healthy Western world "began drifting towards the predicted catastrophe because a philosopher chose to publish a false analysis of the situation" (Voegelin, 1944a: 177-78).

41. Elsewhere, discussing Goethe in an essay of almost the same date, Voegelin acknowledges that it is pedagogically legitimate to restrict one's articulation of truth to the capacity of the reader to receive it (1952b: 61). The point is well-taken in its context, but is inconsistent with his treatment of More. He seems not to have made a mental connection between the two essays.

42. Havel does not propose adopting the structures of Western democracy as a remedy, any more than Voegelin does. That would only be to prefer an alternative ideology. "This static complex of rigid, conceptually sloppy and politically pragmatic mass political parties run by professional apparatuses and releasing the citizen from all forms of concrete and personal responsibility; and those complex foci of capital accumulation engaged in secret manipulations and expansion; the omnipresent dictatorship of consumption, production, advertising . . . can only with great difficulty be imagined as the source of humanity's rediscovery of itself" (1985: 91).

43. It is important to note the type of thinker to whom Voegelin allows maturity. In the "History of Political Ideas", he turns from John Milton and the "leveller" Gerard Winstanley to discuss Sir James Harrington with the remark, "To turn from the forces, passions and pathos of the Revolution to Harrington's *Oceana* [1656] is like entering a sun-flooded room": "he had studied Aristotle and Machiavelli carefully, he had a good knowledge of ancient constitutions, he had read the Bible not with the eye of a Christian but of a scholar who wants to know how the constitution of Israel worked". He had travelled widely "and had brought home from Italy not only knowledge, but something of Mediterranean matureness in political affairs". "To read the 'preliminaries' of the *Oceana*, in which he set forth his principles, is a rare delight in a field where the bulk of literature is marred by passion or by the vanity of the writer who believes that his opinions are important because the subject matter with which he deals is important" (Hooy).

Also in the "History of Political Ideas", Voegelin praises the philosopher Jean Bodin at length for the kind of contemplative detachment which can flourish only in those who refuse adherence to any "cause". The major reason for Bodin's neglect as a political thinker, says Voegelin, "has to be sought in his greatness": for "the contemplative realist is, and always will be, an isolated figure": the centre of attention is always held by those who are "nearer to the excitement and intoxication of the political struggle".

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER ELEVEN

1. Nieli, Webb and Morrissey are primarily interested in Voegelin as a philosopher of consciousness, though Webb's earlier book concerns Voegelin's philosophy of history. Cooper, Germino and Havard have discussed Voegelin's political philosophy, but none attempts a fundamental critique. See the bibliography for details of all these writings.

2. See our preliminary discussion in Chapter One.

3. For a typically scathing review of a work of political science which in Voegelin's view falls into servility through the pretence of objectivity (the shallow objectivity of "equidistance from two parochialisms") see Voegelin 1946d.

4. This point is expanded and explored by Caringella, 1988.

5. For example, Voegelin speaks of "the intellectually disordered language in which we indiscriminately speak of the meaning of life, . . . or the fact of existence which has no meaning, or the meaning which must be given to the fact of existence, as if life were a given and meaning a property it does or does not have" (1971a: 63). To this, he replies that existence is not a fact: "if anything, existence is the non-fact of a disturbing movement in the In-Between". It is true that from the experience of this movement, from the anxiety about losing the right way in the "In-Between of darkness and light" arises the enquiry concerning the meaning of life. But it arises "only because life is experienced as man's participation in a movement with a direction to be found or missed; if man's existence were not a movement but a fact, it would not only have no meaning but the question of meaning could not even arise" (*Ibid*).

As an example of what he is rejecting, Voegelin here cites Sartre's "assumption of a meaningless facticity of existence and his desperate craving for endowing it with a meaning from the resources of his *Moi*". But Voegelin, too, is arguing existentially, resting his whole argument on a qualitatively deeper kind of experience which has been brought to noetic self-consciousness.

6. The danger of self-delusion which attends any personal reflection which remains oblivious to its social location is incisively identified by the former Superior General of the Society of Jesus, in attempting to explain its commitment to "solidarity with the poor": "One who claims to be free from class mentality is rightly suspect. Only with great difficulty do we escape from the claims of

class. The extremely privileged, who have not felt institutionalized injustice in their own flesh, react with amazement and defensiveness before the demands of the masses for a new order. In tranquil possession of what they believe to be their rights they look upon themselves as above the conflict. When they find themselves the object of claims on the part of others, they speak of unjust aggression on what is irrevocably theirs, and maintain that it is licit to defend themselves in every way. This unconscious sense of class is a determining element in the situation. On the other hand, the great masses of the dispossessed, schooled by a long history of suffering and privation and more recently by ideological propaganda, are keenly aware of what is just and unjust." (Arrupe, 1980: 249-50).

My criticism here does not, of course, mean that I charge Voegelin with the ideology of "individualism", as that is neatly described by Parekh (1982: 190-93).

7. See the essay "Conflicting Paradigms of Conversion", (Evans, 1986).

8. That is, faith demands "ideologies" in Segundo's sense of the term "ideology". See note 14 to Chapter One. This is the kind of ideological commitment "tentative and open to criticism and open to change" which Voegelin thinks "will not work" (Conv: 33).



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At the time of the completion of this study, there is published no bibliography of Voegelin's work that is complete in the sense that it includes all his book reviews, as well as his published books and essays. His books and journal articles up to 1981 are fully listed in Sandoz, 1981: 253-60. However, an archive of Voegelin's writings, unpublished as well as published, is possessed by the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford, California. By September 1988 when the present writer visited Stanford, the archive consisted of 101 file boxes. Since further accessions to the archive will render incorrect any box number given now, unpublished documents cited are identified as adequately as possible with the addition of the bibliographical reference, Hooy.

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