

ABSTRACT

Faith Seeking Understanding: The Relationship between Noetic and Pneumatic Differentiation in Eric Voegelin's Political Philosophy

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This thesis is a study of the philosophy of Eric Voegelin with particular focus on the relationship between noetic differentiation (particularly Greek philosophy) and pneumatic differentiation (particularly Christianity). The thesis begins with an examination of the recovery of transcendence in politics through his noetic theory of consciousness and noetic theory of history. It then turns to consider Voegelin's reading of Christianity, which makes a nuanced distinction between the superior Christian differentiation and its subsequent derailed expression. The thesis proposes that, for a variety of reasons, Voegelin gave primacy to Greek philosophy over Christianity in order to restore political order through a "noetically-controlled Christianity."

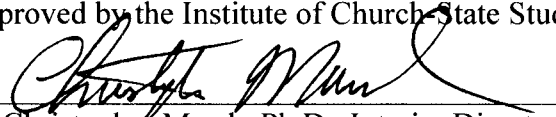
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by

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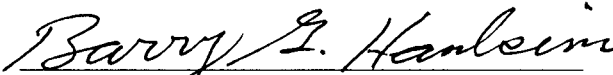
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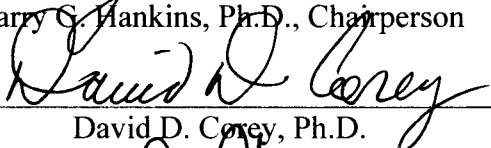
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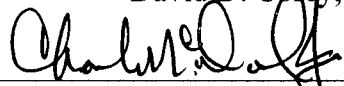

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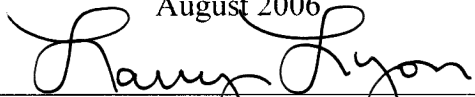
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In Honor of Eric Voegelin (1901-85),
μαῖα μοῦ (my midwife)

Well, my art of midwifery is in most respects like theirs; but differs, in that I attend men and not women; and look after their souls when they are in labour, and not after their bodies: and the triumph of my art is in thoroughly examining whether the thought which the mind of the young man brings forth is a false idol or a noble and true birth. . . . And therefore I am not myself at all wise, nor have I anything to show which is the invention or birth of my own soul, but those who converse with me profit. Some of them appear dull enough at first, but afterwards, as our acquaintance ripens, if the god is gracious to them, they all make astonishing progress; and this in the opinion of others as well as in their own. It is quite dear that they never learned anything from me; the many fine discoveries to which they cling are of their own making.

—Plato, *Theaetetus*, 150b-d

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In the study of the creature one should not exercise a vain and perishing curiosity, but ascend toward what is immortal and everlasting.

—Saint Augustine, *De Vera Religione*

In January 1985, roughly forty people filed into Stanford University’s chapel for the memorial service of one of the most important political philosophers of the 20th century, Eric Voegelin. Voegelin himself chose the reading for the service: selections from Ezekiel, the Gospel of John, and the First Letter of John. Up until the moment of his passing, he had been pouring over an essay published posthumously as “Quod Deus Dicitur?” translated “What is said to be God?”¹ As Voegelin slipped into unconsciousness, the twenty-fifth Psalm was read: “Oh, keep my soul, O Lord, and deliver me: let me not be ashamed, for I put my trust in Thee.” The hours surrounding his death say something important: he was deeply concerned about the question of Christianity. Indeed, during Voegelin’s last minutes, he turned to his wife and said, “At last I understand Christianity!” And she responded, “Yes, Eric, but you’re going to take it with you!”² And he did.

¹ Eric Voegelin, “Quod Deus Dicitur?,” in *Published Essays 1966-1985*, vol. 12, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1990), 376-94.

² Ellis Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution: A Biographical Introduction* (Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 258.

Topic of Study

Voegelin's relationship to Christianity is something of a mystery. A relationship plagued with much debate and speculation. To some, Voegelin fundamentally mishandled Christianity.³ Others read him more sympathetically.⁴ Wherever the truth lies in all this, one thing is certain: Voegelin recognized the fundamental importance of Christian revelation in the history of human understanding. He regarded it as "philosophy itself in its state of perfection."⁵ And yet, in spite of this acknowledgement, Voegelin is surprising in that he fails to discuss Christian revelation in key places and instead returns to Greek philosophy. He even uses Greek philosophy to critique Christian revelation. This tension leads to the question of this thesis: why would a thinker who acknowledges the epochal significance of Christian revelation give primacy to the Greeks in his search for clarity about human consciousness and political order?

³ Bruce Douglass, "A Diminished Gospel: A Critique of Voegelin's Interpretation of Christianity," in *Eric Voegelin's Search for Order in History*, edited by Stephen A. McKnight (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1978), 139-54; Thomas W. Heilke, *Eric Voegelin: In Quest of Reality* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 145-77; Mark Miller, "Regaining the Balance: An Augustinian Response to Eric Voegelin," *Humanitas* 15 (2002): 4-31; Marion Montgomery, "Eric Voegelin and the End of Our Exploring," *Modern Age* 23 (1979): 233-45; Gerhart Niemeyer, "Eric Voegelin's Philosophy and the Drama of Mankind," *Modern Age* 20 (1976): 28-39; Harold Weatherby, "Myth, Fact, and History: Voegelin and Christianity," *Modern Age* 22 (1978): 144-50; and Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, "Professor Voegelin and the Christian Tradition," in *Christianity and Political Philosophy* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1978), 193-208.

⁴ Michael Federici, "Voegelin's Christian Critics," *Modern Age* 36 (1994): 331-40; James Rhodes, "Christian Faith, Jesus the Christ, and History," *The Political Science Reviewer* 27 (1998): 44-67; Sandoz, "Carrying Coal to Newcastle," paper presented at The Eric Voegelin Society at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, Ma., 29 August-1 September, 2002, http://www.artsci.lsu.edu/voegelin/EVS/EVS_dtf.htm (1 October, 2005); David Walsh, "Voegelin's Response to the Disorder of the Age," *Review of Politics* 46 (1984): 266-87; Eugene Webb, *Eric Voegelin: Philosopher of History* (Seattle, Wa.: University of Washington Press, 1981), 221-36; and James L. Wisner, "From Cultural Analysis to Philosophical Anthropology: An Examination of Voegelin's Concept of Gnosticism," *Review of Politics* 42 (1980): 92-104.

⁵ Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture," in *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence Between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934-64*, edited by Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 140.

Almost without exception, Voegelin's work deals with transcendence and its implications for human existence, including the *polis*. His work was animated by a sense of political crisis, which he traced back to a spiritual crisis in the soul of modern man. In his correspondence, he comments to his friend Alfred Schütz that the “philosophical problems of transcendence [are] the decisive problems of philosophy.”⁶ This fixation on transcendence was necessitated by a “decapitation of being,” a rejection of the transcendent, in modern *politike episteme*.⁷ This modern problem is politically significant, because the symbolic expression of the order of being orders political societies. And political tragedies result when the order of reality is perverted (e.g. Nazism). This crisis then demands a spiritual solution. What was needed was an act of “remembering” (*anamnesis*)—that is, recovering what was once understood and articulated about the order of the soul in openness to the transcendent.

To do this, Voegelin looked back primarily to the philosophical work of Plato and Aristotle, particularly their analysis of the order of reality. Again and again, we find Voegelin using Greek philosophy rather than Christian revelation as his touchstone. For example, in the final pages of a seminal essay entitled, “Reason: The Classic Experience,” Voegelin offers his students a “functional aid,” a schematic diagram designed to help them make sense of “order” in man, society, and history. The diagram serves a double purpose according to Voegelin: on the one hand, it allows students to see the “contemporary phenomena of intellectual disorder,” and, on the other hand, it has “the important psychological effect of overcoming the student's sense of disorientation

⁶ Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, vol. 6, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by David Walsh (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 61.

⁷ Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism* (Wilmington, De.: ISI Books, 2004), 40.

and lostness [sic] in the unmanageable flood of false opinions that presses in on them [sic] every day.”⁸ And yet, when we inquire into the source of this diagram, we see that it is Aristotle through and through. Thus, for Voegelin, Greek philosophy not only provided a diagnosis of the modern problem but also aided in ordering the human soul itself.

He even used Greek philosophy to critique Christian revelation. The more well-known critique of Paul in *Ecumenic Age* can be interpreted as, what Marion Montgomery calls, “a Platonic rendering of Paul.”⁹ Using Greek categories, Voegelin concludes that Paul provides an “analytically defective interpretation” of his own experience.¹⁰

What makes Greek philosophy so important for Voegelin? It is the level of “differentiation” reached. Differentiation is (to state it somewhat crudely) a clarification of “reality”—but not just any understanding of reality. Reality, according to Voegelin, is experienced through the participation of a concrete human consciousness in the “In-Between” (*metaxy*), a spatial symbol conveying the event or consciousness as a divine-human encounter. This conscious participation is expressed through symbols. The earliest symbolic expressions of reality in human civilization were compact—that is to say, they exhibit very little differentiation between the levels of being: Divine perfection, total nothingness, man *qua* animal, man *qua* rational being, and so on. Voegelin writes, “All ‘things’ are called directly by their names: heaven and earth, gods and men, country

⁸ Voegelin, “Reason: The Classic Experience,” in *Published Essays 1966-1985*, vol. 12, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 291.

⁹ Montgomery, “Eric Voegelin and the End of Our Exploring,” 244, n9.

¹⁰ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4: *The Ecumenic Age*, vol. 17, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Michael Franz (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 303-39.

and ruler. They are all ‘real’ and ‘true’ in a manner that is not specified further.”¹¹ Yet in Greek philosophy, greater differentiation occurred—that is, elements of the primary experience were separated out. For example, the divine becomes transcendent (as opposed to inter-cosmic).

While Voegelin builds on the accomplishments of Greek philosophy, he also acknowledges the importance of Christian revelation in multiple ways. Readers may think of Voegelin’s well-known analysis of Gnosticism.¹² Rooted in Augustinian theology, Christianity “de-divinized” the ancient world, in a certain sense. It eliminated those pagan gods who were thought to be physically present, protecting the city and governing mankind. Moreover, it effectively demoted the importance of human politics, of “the city of man,” as a salvific center of order. Thus Voegelin writes, “The spiritual destiny of man in the Christian sense cannot be represented on earth by the power organization of a political society; it can be represented only by the church.”¹³ This theology dominated much of the Middle Ages.

Yet a desire to “re-divinize” political society quickly emerged because of the problem of (i.e., the *demand* for) “existential representation.” What was sought was a “civil theology” that could symbolize and represent the transcendent order of being for the purposes of political life. But this was inherently dangerous. Indeed, it led to a

¹¹ Voegelin, “What is Political Reality?,” in *Anamnesis*, vol. 6, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by David Walsh (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 358.

¹² Voegelin offered six defining characteristics of Gnostic movements: (1) dissatisfaction with the current situation, (2) viewing the world as intrinsically organized poorly, (3) believing salvation from the evil of the world possible, (4) believing the order of being will have to be changed in the process, (5) understanding that change in the order of being lies in the realm of human action, and (6) knowledge of the method of change is central. Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, 64-65.

¹³ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago, 1987), 106.

problem of its own—what Voegelin called “Gnosticism.” What is Gnosticism? In Voegelin’s technical vocabulary, it is the pernicious tendency to believe that through elite knowledge and insight the Christian vision of eternal peace could be obtained *on earth by means of politics*. Modern re-divinization thus sought to “immanentize the Christian eschaton”—that is, to seek an earthly fulfillment of the sort which, in Christianity, must await the end of time.¹⁴

In all this, we see Voegelin acknowledging the crucial importance of Christianity not only in advancing human understanding about the divine, but also in explaining political order *and disorder* in history. Voegelin devoted an impressive amount of energy to Christianity throughout his corpus. And, in fact, he intended to dedicate two entire volumes to Christianity.¹⁵ (The original format for *Order and History* included a volume on *Empire and Christianity* and another volume on *The Protestant Centuries*.)

What needs emphasizing in particular, here, is that Voegelin thought Christian revelation represented “maximal differentiation.” Even though Greek philosophy was an advance, Christianity was its fulfillment. There is no question that Christianity adopted Greek philosophy. Voegelin writes:

By absorbing the life of reason in the form of Hellenistic philosophy, the gospel of the early *ekklēsia tou theou* has become the Christianity of the church. If the community of the gospel had not entered the culture of the time by entering its life of reason, it would have remained an obscure sect and probably disappeared from history.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid., 121-27.

¹⁵ Voegelin reduced the analysis to a portion of the fourth volume, *The Ecumenic Age*, a move distained by some Christian thinkers. The revision was not a byproduct of an alteration in Voegelin’s philosophy. As Ellis Sandoz replies, “The silence in his late writings on the specific subject of Christianity cannot be construed as evidence of any such change of heart. To argue otherwise involves something akin to reading tea leaves.” There is no evidence that Voegelin altered his understanding of Christianity as philosophy perfected. Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution*, 153.

¹⁶ Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture,” 140.

But Christianity was not merely the offspring of philosophy; it offered further differentiation of its own (e.g. the “impossibility of *philia* between God and man” expressed in classic philosophy was clarified, and fulfilled, by the Christian “bending of God in grace toward the soul,” exemplified most potently in the Incarnation).¹⁷

Given these accomplishments, Christian revelation is fundamental in Voegelin’s political philosophy. Voegelin writes, “I would take it as a principle of philosophizing that the philosopher must include in his interpretation the maximally differentiated experiences. . . . *Now with Christianity a decisive differentiation has occurred* [italics added].¹⁸ Though it may be possible to “do philosophy” apart from a Christian framework, it would seem that, after the birth of Christ, such an enterprise would be at least undesirable, if not irresponsible.

And this leads to the very question which interests us here: if Christian revelation is maximal differentiation, then why would Voegelin give primacy to the Greeks (rather than Christianity) to recover the most fully differentiated consciousness that would serve as an antidote to the modern problem? Before I consider a number of hypotheses below, I want to address three partial answers to this question. These partial answers in fact help to clarify the question I want to pursue.

One partial answer relates to Voegelin’s distinction between “noetic” and “pneumatic” differentiation. Noetic differentiation is (to put it simply) characterized as man’s search for God (e.g. Greek philosophy); while pneumatic differentiation is

¹⁷ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 78.

¹⁸ Voegelin, “On Christianity (Letter to Alfred Schütz, 1 January, 1953), in *The Philosophy of Order: Essays on History, Consciousness, and Politics*, edited by Peter J. Opitz and Gregor Sebba (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 450.

characterized by God's search for man (e.g. Israelite revelation).¹⁹ Both experiences are divine-human encounters (theophanies), distinguished by their accent, either human or divine.

Even though Christianity is a "leap in being," Voegelin is clear that the noetic differentiation articulated by philosophy is in fact clearer at some points in expressing the order of reality than Christian revelation.²⁰ Thus it is not only "maximal differentiation" that matters, but also the clarity or philosophical precision of the differentiation, and here, Greek philosophy proves superior in some ways. It follows that since Greek philosophy is clearer at some points, the use of the Greeks is to be expected, regardless of the pneumatic advances of Christianity. However, this is only a partial answer at best, for, as Voegelin realizes, the Greek noetic differentiation is actually a *part* of Christianity, and thus his use of the former does not necessarily negate the use of Christianity as a part of the political solution.

Second, the distinction between noetic and pneumatic differentiation clarifies our problem in another respect as well: Greek philosophy with its use of noetic differentiation balanced the paradox within reality itself identified as the Beginning and the Beyond. Though reality is one, it is experienced in these two modes. The Beginning is the "experience of the existence and intelligible structure of things in the cosmos" expressed typically in creation myths.²¹ The Beyond is present in the "immediate experience of movements in the psyche" directed towards the eschatological end.²² Exemplified in

¹⁹ Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution*, 254.

²⁰ Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture," 173.

²¹ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4: *The Ecumenic Age*, 63.

²² *Ibid.*

Plato, the Greek noetic differentiation maintained the balance of the paradox; Plato surrounded the “noetic core with his belt of uncertainty” to guard against an obsession of the Beyond, or the *eschaton*. However, according to Voegelin, Christian pneumatic differentiation abolished the paradox; Paul in particular displays impatience in his apocalyptic assurances.²³ This loss of balance led to an “egophanic revolt,” or Gnostic tendencies, to immanentize the Beyond through human means. Since Greek philosophy balanced the paradox, its use is understandable.

The third, and final, partial answer to consider is Christianity’s dogmatic tendencies. Not long after its inception, Christianity formulated dogma, “protective deformations,” to guard these symbols of participation from distortion.²⁴ Though intended for good, these dogmas led to a deformation by modern ideologues. Perhaps Voegelin was hesitant about using the symbols of Christianity because of their potential for being misinterpreted as dogma, or concepts removed from their experience. This could explain his supposed “unorthodox” reading of Christianity—that is, his tendency to shy away from discussion of important Christian events such as the crucifixion and resurrection. He writes, “The great obstacle to this return is the massive block of accumulated symbols . . . that eclipses the reality of man’s existence in the Metaxy.”²⁵ Since the modern problem finds its roots in Christian dogmatization of reality, restoration might be well served outside the genealogy of disorder.

²³ Ibid., 274-339.

²⁴ Ibid., 107.

²⁵ Ibid.

But this can only be a partial explanation at best. While Christianity is a vital player in the modern deformation, it is not alone. Greek philosophy also derailed.²⁶ As a matter of fact, Voegelin recognized several influences of the modern deformation: “the contemporary disorder will appear in a rather new light when we leave the ‘climate of opinion,’ and . . . acknowledge the problems of ‘modernity’ to be caused by the predominance of Gnostic, Hermetic, and alchemistic conceits, as well as by the magic of violence as the means for transforming reality.”²⁷

Since these clarifications are insufficient, we return to the question: If Christianity is “philosophy in its state of perfection,” why does Greek noetic differentiation maintain primacy in Voegelin’s new science of politics? I have formulated three preliminary hypotheses that will be evaluated in the ensuing chapters.

(1) Perhaps Voegelin did not believe Christianity could contribute to the *politike episteme* of this world. At first glance, the writings meditating on Judeo-Christian revelation appear apolitical. Yet Christianity certainly has had political implications, even if only negative (e.g. Gnosticism). But perhaps its political-ness is a distortion of its true essence. This answer is tempting, and I shall consider it further in the chapters that follow; however, it is not likely to be correct. For if both Greek philosophy and Christian revelation are indeed theophanies, there is little reason to suspect a substantive difference based simply on the mode of differentiation: if noetic theophanies provide insight into political order (as Voegelin believes), then pneumatic theophanies should as well.

²⁶ Voegelin, “What is Political Reality?,” 381-98.

²⁷ Voegelin, “Response to Professor Altizer’s ‘A New History and a New but Ancient God?,”” in *Published Essays 1966-1985*, vol. 12, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 298.

(2) Perhaps Voegelin believed, as Murray Jardine argues, that the modern problem “is not a rebellion against Christianity but precisely a more complete realization of Christianity’s own essence.”²⁸ In other words, Christianity poses an inescapable political problem. Indeed, in its analysis of Christian revelation, Voegelin’s work is quite clear that Gnostic “tendencies” are present in the revelation itself.²⁹ Thus, Voegelin would either radicalize Christian revelation (removing its Gnostic tendencies) or produce another radical form of “existential representation” to reorder political life.

(3) Or maybe he is using noetic differentiation to restore order through Christianity.³⁰ In this hypothesis, restoration of the order of reality through noetic differentiation is not an abandonment of Christian revelation for Greek philosophy, since Christianity absorbed the Greeks. On the contrary, Greek philosophy is foundational for a restoration of Christianity, the *preparation evangelica*. He writes:

The believers are at rest in an uninquiring state of faith; their intellectual metabolism must be stirred by the reminder that man is supposed to be a questioner, that a believer who is unable to explain how his faith is an answer to the enigma of existence may be a ‘good Christian’ but is a questionable man. . . . It will be necessary, therefore, to recover the question to which, in Hellenistic-Roman culture, the philosopher could understand the gospel as the answer.³¹

Thus, Voegelin’s use of noetic differentiation is not a rejection of pneumatic differentiation but its affirmation.

²⁸ Murray Jardine, “Eric Voegelin’s Interpretation(s) of Modernity: A Reconsideration of the Spiritual and Political Implications of Voegelin’s Therapeutic Analysis,” *Review of Politics* 57 (1995): 600-01.

²⁹ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4: *The Ecumenic Age*, 64.

³⁰ See Michael Federici, “Voegelin’s Christian Critics,” *Modern Age* 36 (1994): 331-40.

³¹ Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture,” 141-42.

Research Method

The primary focus of research involves an analysis of Voegelin's writings, particularly his later work. These writings will be examined with a view towards outlining Voegelin's reading of the loss of the divine in human experience, his reading of Christianity, and his use, or lack thereof, of noetic and pneumatic modes in his new *politike episteme*. Voegelin's later work will warrant most of the attention. This methodological choice is justified for three reasons. First, given the length of Voegelin's career and his prolific writing, examining a portion of his corpus seems reasonable, if not necessary. (Voegelin wrote nearly twenty books in either English or German and over a hundred articles spanning a career of several decades.) Second, Voegelin's later work is arguably the most important. Even Voegelin himself recognized this. For example, his wife recalled how almost every day he read and reread the last and unfinished manuscript of *Order and History*: "he let me know that he knew very well that these pages are the key to all his other works and that in these pages he has gone as far as he could go in analysis, saying what he wanted to say as clearly as it possibly could be said."³² Though defining his thought as changing is too drastic, definite refinements occurred during his career. These nuances are vital in understanding the relationship between noetic and pneumatic differentiation. Some of the more important sources for this study include books, such as *Anamnesis* (1972), *Order and History, vol. IV: Ecumenic Age* (1974), *Order and History, vol. V: In Search of Order* (1987) and articles, such as "Immortality: Experience and Symbol (1967)," "The Gospel and Culture (1971)," "Reason: The Classic Experience (1974)," "The Beginning and the Beyond (1975-1978)," "Wisdom and the

³² Lissy Voegelin, "Forward," in *Order and History, vol. 5: In Search of Order*, vol. 18, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 13-14.

Magic of Extreme: A Meditation (1981),” and “Quod Deus Dicitur? (1986)” (dictated from his death bed).

Though this thesis asks a question internal to Voegelin’s thought, secondary sources will also be used. These sources provide interlocutors that help in understanding Voegelin’s work and help in wrestling with the perplexing question raised in this thesis. There is one weakness in this body of secondary literature: some of the important works discussing the issue of Voegelin and Christianity are older and thus arguably less conclusive. For example, Bruce Douglass’ “The Gospel and the Political Order: Eric Voegelin on the Political Role of Christianity (1976)” was published about a decade prior to Voegelin’s last piece. One could argue that it was this last decade of work that is most helpful for dealing with questions about Voegelin on Christianity.

Chapter Divisions

This introduction is followed by four chapters and a conclusion. The second chapter, “The Recovery of Transcendence: A Theory of Consciousness,” will examine Voegelin’s wrestling with the “problem of politics” in the modern world, during his early years as a young graduate student in Germany; it will also consider Voegelin’s striking realization that the vehicle necessary for addressing this problem was to be found in Voegelin’s own consciousness, that is, in an analysis of the very structure of consciousness. This chapter will reflect on how he defined the nature of the problem (political ideologies and modern political science) and the nature of the solution (a theory of consciousness). The Greek nature of Voegelin’s recovery of transcendence through his theory of consciousness will also be demonstrated.

In the third chapter, “The Recovery of Transcendence: A Theory of History,” I will discuss further Voegelin’s attempt to recover the order of reality. If the modern problem is due to a deformation of the order of being, the solution is a restoration of the order of being. I will discuss Voegelin’s theory of history, particularly the ordering of history. For Voegelin, through this knowledge of the history of order emerges the order of history.³³ This chapter will also discuss shifts in Voegelin’s theory that occurred during his career. Major technical categories in Voegelin’s theory of history, such as differentiation, noetic and pneumatic modes, and equivalence, will be defined. This chapter will also conclude by demonstrating the Greek nature of Voegelin’s theory of history.

In the fourth chapter, “Voegelin on Christianity,” I will analyze how Christian revelation relates to the Greeks (as solution) and modernity (as problem). In relation to the Greeks, I will discuss four issues. The absorption of Greek noetic thought in Christianity will be analyzed. A comparison between the Christian revelation and Greek philosophy will also be given. I will discuss Christian revelation as maximal differentiation. Finally, the political implications of this maximal differentiation will be provided.

In relation to modernity, I will discuss a few topics. First, I will examine Voegelin’s concept of “egophanic revolt,” which consists in eliminating the tension of existence by “immanentizing the eschaton.”³⁴ This will be done by analyzing his critique of Paul. Second, I will analyze Murray Jardine’s provocative argument that, for

³³ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 1: *Israel and Revelation*, vol. 14, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Maurice Hogan (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 19.

³⁴ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4: *Ecumenic Age*, 327.

Voegelin, the problem of modern Gnosticism is the very *realization* of the essence of Christianity. I will finally then discuss the tension that arises in Voegelin's reading of Christianity, namely his defense of the superiority of the Christian differentiation and his subsequent criticism rooted in Greek philosophy.

The conclusion will seek to provide an answer to the major question of this thesis: if Christian revelation is maximal differentiation, then why would Voegelin give primacy to the Greeks (rather than Christianity) to recover the most fully differentiated consciousness that would serve as an antidote to modern problems? This chapter will supply an analysis of the three major hypothesis offered in the introduction and, after explaining my preference for one of these in particular, some final reflections will be offered.

CHAPTER TWO

The Recovery of Transcendence: A Theory of Consciousness

For man does not wait for science to have his life explained to him . . . Human society is not merely a fact, or an event, . . . it is a whole little world, a cosmos illuminated with meaning from within by the human beings who continuously create and bear it.

—Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*

Erupting as a crisis within his own consciousness, Voegelin sensed disorder early in his career. On the one hand, he identified a restriction of reality in political mass movements and various schools of philosophy. On the other hand, he experienced in his own psyche a larger horizon of reality than these modern philosophies and methods allowed. Thus, Voegelin concluded that the modern problem was a disordering of reality, in part by eclipsing the transcendent, and that the cure was a proper theory of consciousness that restored reality to its fullness.

Knowledge of the role that experience played in Voegelin's philosophy is essential in order to understand his work. As Ellis Sandoz writes, "I have no doubt that the right starting point for one who wishes to understand Eric Voegelin is an appreciation of the centrality of common sense and ordinary experience in his work."¹ This starting point for proper philosophic investigation was not foreign to Voegelin himself. As a matter of fact, beginning with experiential roots is actually consonant with the way in which he himself read the history of philosophy: "The reality of experience is self-interpretive. What is experienced and symbolized as reality, in an advancing process of

¹ Ellis Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution: A Biographical Introduction* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 18-19.

differentiation, is the substance of history . . . [This is the] principle that lies at the basis of all my later work.”² Thus, an analysis of experience is foundational.

The Eclipse of Transcendence in Politics

Just what was this experiential foundation for Voegelin? In short, it was a sense of political disorder. Though one could make a case that Voegelin sometimes appears apolitical (especially in his later work), such a claim is simply unfounded. Voegelin writes: “The motivations of my work are simple. They arise from the political situation,”³ a situation marked by the devastation inflicted by political mass movements (most potently by Nazi Germany) and by the incapacity of modern political science to provide a remedy. The cause for political disorder in both accounts laid in their mutual restriction of reality. The political mass movements altered reality by providing unquestionable theories that created distorted constructions of reality or, as Voegelin called them, “second realities.”⁴ Political science method constricts reality via an allegiance to scientific positivism.

The effects of the political mass movements disturbed Voegelin. Some of his earliest work attempted to understand the chaos ensuing in Europe and abroad. For example, both *Race and State* (1933)⁵ and *The Race Idea in Intellectual History* (1933)⁶

² Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1989), 81.

³ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁴ Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism* (Wilmington, De.: ISI Books, 2004), 26-27.

⁵ Voegelin, *Race and State*, vol. 2, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Klaus Vondung (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1997).

⁶ Voegelin, *The History of the Race Idea From Ray to Carus*, vol. 3, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Klaus Vondung (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1998).

exposed Germany's dehumanizing effects. Voegelin argued in effect that Germany's ideology stripped man of both his spiritual and historical essence. Thus, man became simply material (making it easier to expose or dispose of him).

Voegelin was not only an outsider casting political (and moral) criticism from afar. When Hitler's reach stretched outside of Germany, this native Austrian became an inside threat soon enough. As one would expect, the Nazis did not take kindly to Voegelin's critique. His *An Authoritarian State* (1936) was banned by the Nazis after Hitler's annexation of Austria.⁷ Not long after, Voegelin and his wife, Lissy, fled their home country, barely escaping arrest (and probably death). There can be no doubt that such events had a life-long impact upon his thought.

According to Voegelin, underlining the political tragedy of Nazism was a distortion of reality that had religious foundations.⁸ It became clear to Voegelin that the devastating occurrences in Nazi Germany could not be explained away by institutional or societal reasons. This battle was of religious proportions, a battle between good and evil itself. Voegelin writes, "[O]ne should be able to proceed on the assumption that there is evil in the world and, moreover, that evil is not only a deficient mode of being, a negative element, but also a real substance and force that is effective in the world."⁹ He then writes that this "satanical force" can only be resisted with an equally strong, religiously good force. (One can quickly see how Voegelin would have fallen rather quickly out of favor with the Nazis.) At its root, the problem was the "decapitation of God." This

⁷ Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution*, 62-63.

⁸ Voegelin, *The Political Religions*, vol. 5, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Manfred Henningsen (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

immanentization of reality was expressed in two ways: the Fuehrer himself and the historical claim of the Third Reich.

For Nazism, the Fuehrer was the embodiment of the “spirit.” Yet it is important to identify the nature of this spirit. In ancient civilizations (e.g. Egypt and Israel), there were mediators (Pharaoh and Moses) between the divine and the people. However, in modernity, the source of legitimization of the *polis* is no longer a transcendent origin but rather the community itself. The “spirit” of the people is not some divine whose will is mediated to the people by their human sovereign. Rather, the “spirit” of the people becomes their united will through political action. Voegelin writes, “The people (*Volk*) is the ‘people in its plurality,’ as a community of language, customs, culture, economic activity, and it becomes the ‘people in unity,’ the historical person, through the political organization.”¹⁰ And in Nazism, it is in the Fuehrer that this will is most potent. Thus, this inner-worldly spirit speaks to the people through the Fuehrer in a similar fashion as Ra speaking to the Pharaoh or God speaking to Abraham. One point of tension in this immanentized theory is, though the people participate in the general will, they in no way determine political action. The Fuehrer is the embodiment of this general will and can only be known by him. Thus, political participation is simply an expression of loyalty to that will (and the Fuehrer). Gerhard Schumann’s “Lieder von Reich” expresses this religious-political sentiment: “And descending He [the Fuehrer] carried the torch in the night. The millions submitted to him in silence. Saved. The sky was ablaze in the pale light morning. The sun grew. And with it grew the ‘Reich.’”¹¹ Like Moses’ mediation

¹⁰ Ibid., 65.

¹¹ Quoted in Ibid., 68.

between God and Israel on Mt. Sinai, the Fuehrer descends to express the will of the spirit and to lead his people to salvation.

The term “Third Reich” also expressed religious connotations. Voegelin drew a connection (both historical and existential) between Hitler’s “Third Reich” and the apocalyptic reading of history by twelfth century thinker Joachim of Flora.¹² Joachim constructed a Trinitarian and eschatological reading of history. In this schema, the first period of world history is the age of the Father. With the incarnation of Christ, the second age begins. However, the third and final period of human history is the age of the Spirit. This reading of history is in stark contrast with classical understandings of history that emphasize the *transcendent* movement of history (e.g. Augustine’s *City of God*).¹³ In Joachim’s distortion of history, the transcendent movement of history has essentially become immanentized. This apocalyptic and progressive reading of history can even be seen in popular divisions of world history: ancient, medieval (the Dark Ages), and modern (the Enlightenment). In Germany’s history, the first two “empires” that ended in 1806 and 1918 was then followed by the “Third Reich,” the empire that would bring salvation for the Germanic peoples.

So far, I have been speaking only of politics as it was being practiced in Voegelin’s day, particularly in Nazi Germany. But, not only was the state of politics in turmoil, political science itself was in disarray as well. Voegelin writes that during graduate school he was introduced to a host of methodologies (the value-free method of

¹² Ibid., 50-52.

¹³ More discussion will be given to the classical reading of history, its modern counter-part, and Voegelin’s philosophy of history in the subsequent chapter.

Max Weber, positivism of various sorts, neo-Kantianism, and phenomenology).¹⁴ Yet even this superabundance of methodologies was of no value for solving the dilemma, because they too had restricted reality. Voegelin writes, “The default of the school philosophies was caused by a restriction of the horizon similar to the restrictions of consciousness that I could observe in the political mass movements.”¹⁵ As in the political mass movements, scientific method had eclipsed the transcendent as well.

This restriction is the result of a compromise accomplished by the rise of positivism.¹⁶ Positivism restricts the field of proper study to the world of phenomena which in turn excludes transcendence. In this scheme, the tangible world (fact) constitutes true knowledge, while things intangible (values) constitute opinion (not true knowledge). Ironically, this restriction produces a science along the lines of philodoxy (love of opinion) instead of philosophy (love of truth). In the classical sense, philodoxy is constrained to the world of the phenomena and the changing; whereas, philosophy is grounded in a study of the unchanging transcendent. Positivism necessarily restricts scientific methodology to the phenomena. For Voegelin, modern political science is properly construed as opinion, because truth is only known in relationship to unrestricted reality.

If the production of second realities fostered the violence of political mass movements, what caused the distortion in political science? In short, political science presupposed the superiority of the natural sciences over other sciences. This superiority

¹⁴ Voegelin, “Remembrance of Things Past,” in *Published Essays 1966-1985*, vol. 12, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1990), 304.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 305.

¹⁶ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 1-13.

was rooted in two assumptions: (1) that other sciences could achieve similar success only if they relied upon natural science methodology and (2) that the use of natural science method ensured academic relevance.

Though the first assumption is dangerous, Voegelin argues that the real source of disorder lies in the second assumption, because its logical conclusion is the subordination of theory to method.¹⁷ In this view, political science becomes almost a mathematical formula. Yet for Voegelin, different objects of study require different methods of research. “A political scientist who tries to understand the meaning of Plato’s *Republic* will not have much use for mathematics,” he writes. “A biologist who studies cell structure will not have much use for methods of classical philology and principles of hermeneutics.”¹⁸ The end of science (properly understood) is to unlock the deeper truths of given reality in order to better structure the *polis*. Thus, only when facts contribute to this larger scientific *telos* should they be considered relevant. However, Voegelin argues that positivism results in an equality of relevance. In other words, regardless of their contribution to the larger *telos* of truth, facts are considered relevant, because of the means by which they were obtained (i.e. scientific method), regardless of their relationship to reality.

This destruction of science is manifest in three ways.¹⁹ First, the mass accumulation of theoretically unprocessed facts demonstrates the disorder. Yet as Voegelin well perceives that rarely, if ever, does one find a mass of facts without any

¹⁷ Ibid., 4-8.

¹⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹⁹ Ibid., 8-13.

theoretical explanation. The need for interpretation leads to the more important manifestations of positivism. Given the elevation of method over theory, fact selection is driven, not by a developed theory, but by a host of other factors (e.g. political preference). The final manifestation is the attempt to make political science objective and value-free. In this view, the facts of the phenomenal world become truth (philosophy), and the values of the noumenal world become opinion (philodoxy), the exact opposite view expressed in the *politike episteme* of Plato and Aristotle.

Voegelin's "New Science"

Now, the criticisms of political ideology and radical scientism that we have been examining stem from Voegelin's own experiential insight into the larger horizons of reality (particularly transcendence), not from the political mass movements or scientific methodology. Voegelin writes, "I had observed the restriction, and recognized it as such, with the criteria of the observation coming from a consciousness with a larger horizon, which in this case happened to be my own."²⁰

In effect, his experience of this larger horizon justifies its existence. Voegelin provided no logical or analytical proof for such a theory, though his theory is not without any rational basis (properly understood). This point highlights the common sense approach Voegelin took to political theory (as acknowledged by Sandoz earlier).²¹ It is well known that his entire project is easily contestable. At first, it appears that all one needs to do is question his experience. In the world of ideas, his philosophic claims

²⁰ Voegelin, "Remembrance of Things Past," 304-305.

²¹ For a full discussion of common sense in Voegelin's political philosophy see Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution*, 6-32.

cannot be proven, a point that Voegelin himself would acknowledge. One who does not recognize this larger horizon in his own experience will view Voegelin's philosophy as skeptical at best. Yet to the one who does recognize a similar reality, no argument or idea could convince him otherwise.

Yet this larger horizon of reality is not without empirical warrant, even if the evidence would not pass positivistic muster. There is a common order to reality that is experienced universally in human cultures and civilizations throughout recorded history. For example, the search for the ground of existence, or human origins, is commonplace in every known civilization.²² It should also be noted that any enterprise that eclipses the transcendent cannot in essence refute theories that include the transcendent.²³ Voegelin writes that, in order to degrade classical political philosophy to the rank of opinion, "a conscientious scholar would first have to show that their claim to be science was unfounded. And that attempt is self-defeating."²⁴ This defeat is because, in order to respond adequately to things transcendent, one has to become intimately aware of those things, an intimacy that modern methodology curtails.

This concern over the modern problem found in political mass movements and political science was not exclusive to Voegelin. Others revolted against the disorder as well. Voegelin himself attests to the work of neo-Kantians, neo-Platonists, and neo-

²² See Voegelin's discussion of the search for the ground in "In Search of the Ground," in *Published Essays 1953-1965*, vol. 11, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 224-51.

²³ Leo Strauss makes a similar claim in his essay, "The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy:" "Since such a true or adequate, as distinguished from a merely clear and distinct, account of the whole, is certainly not available; philosophy has never refuted revelation. Nor, to come back to what I said before, has revelation, or rather theology, ever refuted philosophy." See *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin 1934-1964*, edited by Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 232.

²⁴ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 20.

Thomists.²⁵ Yet their theories were ultimately to Voegelin's dissatisfaction. He writes: "I sensed the revolt, but I sensed it also as a beginning that could be short-circuited into new restrictive school formations."²⁶ In short, he remained detached from them, because he felt that they could fall prey to similar restrictions, self-imposed or otherwise, that were at the root of the modern problem. He also did not want to tie himself to a particular school of thought for he was grateful to any source that expanded the horizons of reality.

One example of a theory that dissatisfied Voegelin is the theory of consciousness developed by twentieth century phenomenologist Edmund Husserl. Voegelin praised Husserl's work, particularly his clarifications on the structure and intentionality of consciousness.²⁷ Concerning Husserl's essay, "The Crisis of European Sciences," Voegelin writes, "I am more than willing to recognize this essay as the most significant achievement in epistemological critique of our time."²⁸

However, Husserl's theory was found wanting. In short, Husserl's philosophy of history fell prey to the same immanent apocalypticism that Voegelin had identified in Germany's "Third Reich" (and others such as Auguste Comte, Georg F. W. Hegel, and Karl Marx). According to Husserl, the historical account of reason took place in three stages: a prehistory that ended with Greek philosophy; a history that began with Greek philosophy and ended with Husserl (though this position was interrupted by Christian

²⁵ Voegelin, "Remembrance of Things Past," 306-07.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Voegelin, "A Letter to Schütz Concerning Husserl," in *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics*, vol. 6, edited by David Walsh (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 46.

theology); and a last phase of history that begins with Husserl himself.²⁹ Voegelin writes, “It (Husserl’s work) also irritated me considerably because of the somewhat naïve arrogance of a philosopher who believed that . . . from now on everybody who wanted to be a solid philosopher had to be a follower of Husserl.”³⁰ For Voegelin, Husserl had abolished history in order to justify removing the historical dimension of man’s consciousness (Husserl’s “transcendental I”).³¹ Thus, according to Husserl, man could become aware of his own self and reality without any historical contextualization. To correct this distortion of existence, Voegelin’s theory of consciousness would reintroduce the historical dimension to consciousness, or man’s self-awareness, that Husserl removed.

This restoration of history was only a part of Voegelin’s project. He offered a “new science” of politics. For him, a proper political science provided therapy to the disorder of the age by working from given reality. (Of course, readers will wonder what I mean by “given.” He answers this question by reference to an impressive analysis of human consciousness which involves a recovery of the Platonic-Aristotelian account of the soul that will be discussed later.) Thus, a true political science will be philosophic, instead of philodoxic. That is to say, instead of providing escape by looking purely to phenomena, political science should seek to understand unchanging reality, including transcendence.

²⁹ Voegelin, “Remembrance of Things Past,” 310.

³⁰ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 70-75.

³¹ Voegelin, “On the Theory of Consciousness,” in *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics*, vol. 6, edited by David Walsh (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 82-83.

This new science necessitated a return to, and a restoration of, classic political science. This classic discipline arose during a period of political disorder (similar to the disorder of modernity). Plato and Aristotle attempted to order the *polis* to truth amidst opinion. Voegelin writes:

And Platonic-Aristotelian analysis does in fact operate on the assumption that there is an order of being accessible to a science beyond opinion. Its aim is knowledge of the order of being, of the levels of hierarchy of being and their interrelationships, of the essential structure of the realms of being, and especially of human nature and its place in the totality of being.³²

Voegelin believed that because his new science opened up the whole order of being to analysis, it could provide truth, not just opinion, just like the Platonic-Aristotelian analysis. Thus, his *new* science turns out to be nothing new at all. Voegelin writes with some irony that “the test of truth . . . will be the lack of originality in the propositions.”³³

Though it is not new in that sense, it should not be confused with a mere return to classical political theory or a revival of classical political literature. It is no accident that one of Voegelin’s most noted students called his work revolutionary.³⁴ Voegelin writes, “Much can be learned, to be sure, from the earlier philosophers concerning the range of problems, as well as concerning their theoretical treatment; but the very historicity of human existence . . . precludes a valid reformulation of principles through a return to former concreteness.”³⁵ (Voegelin recognized the value in the recovery of

³² Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, 13.

³³ Voegelin, “Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History,” in *Published Essays 1966-1985*, vol. 12, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1990).

³⁴ See Sandoz’s argument that Voegelin’s project is a revolution in the field of science in *The Voegelinian Revolution*, 188-216.

³⁵ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 2.

classic texts in various academic disciplines. He hoped that these accounts would perhaps spark a larger horizon of reality within the reader.)

Political science must also include “a work of theoretization which starts from the concrete, historical situation of the age, taking into account the full amplitude of our empirical knowledge.”³⁶ That is to say, political science is a *science*. It relies on raw data to find a proper order for man and society. This data is an essential aspect of the process (as it was for the classic philosophers) in ordering a *polis*. Yet political science as a science is concerned about truth which can only be found within the larger framework of reality. It is equally dangerous for a political scientist to remove transcendence from theory as it is for a philosopher to strip the classical analysis of politics out of its historical and empirical context.

One of the clearest examples of this theoretization is his elucidation of Aristotelian philosophy, particularly his theory of consciousness. It is evident that Voegelin builds on the foundation laid by the Aristotle’s theory of consciousness. He writes, “Because the prototypical attempt of such an exegesis—classical philosophy—was essentially successful, our present endeavor may take it as a starting point. In fact . . . we may follow, through translation, the classical vocabulary, especially the vocabulary of Aristotle.”³⁷ After laying such a framework, he then writes, “Our own analysis has followed Aristotle’s as far as this was possible. We now have to determine at which point a noetic exegesis *within the historical setting of our time* has to depart from

³⁶ Ibid., 2-3.

³⁷ Voegelin, “What is Political Reality,” in *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics*, vol. 6, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by David Walsh (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 346.

Aristotle's analysis [*italics added*]."³⁸ It should be noted that by "departing" Voegelin does not have in mind departing by altering, but departing by refining.

For example, Voegelin expresses concern over Aristotle's term "*ousia*" (being).³⁹ Voegelin believed that *ousia* lost its ability to express reality properly, because it could not adequately differentiate between divine and human essences. To guard against distortion, he argues that it ought to be replaced with the term "reality," which would encompass both transcendence and immanence. Thus, it would provide the ability to distinguish properly between the two essences.

This contemporary *politike episteme* was rooted in his theory of consciousness. This theory expanded its horizon beyond the restrictive confines of modernity. In his own consciousness, this expansion was sparked by disorder (as previously discussed) and crystallized through the process of remembrance (*anamnesis*), which led to an "exploration of his own consciousness in order to discover its constitution by his own experiences of reality."⁴⁰

A major method of philosophical analysis for Voegelin was *anamnesis*. As noted earlier, Voegelin's project is very much based on recalling through memory his own personal experiences. It was his own consciousness that recognized the restriction in both the political mass movements and political science in his day. Some of the more fascinating reflections that Voegelin recorded were several "anamnetic experiments" that

³⁸ Ibid., 357.

³⁹ Ibid., 358-73.

⁴⁰ Voegelin, "Remembrance of Things Past," 304-05.

were conducted between 25 October and 7 November, 1943.⁴¹ There are twenty of these reflections that range from when he was just fourteen months of age to just prior his tenth birthday.

In two of these experiments, Voegelin remembers sentiments of a transcendent-like utopia, or an unattainable world *beyond* our own existence.⁴² He lived near the Ölberg, the highest of seven mountains near the Rhine River. From the top of this high mountain, he could see the three Breiberge Mountains, each of a different height, but behind the Breiberge was “Never-Never Land,” or so his fairy-tale books told him. Yet “Never-Never Land” was to him unattainable because it seemed impossible to reach by its designated path, namely to eat one’s way through the Breiberge made of cream of wheat. First of all, Voegelin did not care for cream of wheat. Furthermore, the prospect of suffocating midway through the mountain made the journey too risky. Another fairy-tale world was Paradise, which also seemed unattainable to him. It was far off in the east. Voegelin remembers the path to Paradise described as long and difficult and only a few had every gotten there. He recalls, “The matter seemed hopeless also to me; I gave up Paradise.”⁴³

Voegelin also could recall his earliest anxieties about death and the tension between it and life. One of the earliest accounts has already been stated: suffocating while eating through a mountain made of cream of wheat on the way to “Never-Never Land.” Another account was the appearance of Halley’s Comet. He remembered hearing

⁴¹ Voegelin, “Anamnesis,” in *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics*, vol. 6, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by David Walsh (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 84-98.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 88-89.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 89.

speculation that the earth could actually be in the comet's path. And if this was the case, the world might come to an end. Though he was somewhat skeptical, he still felt a fear of death. He also recalled a famous fairy-tale, the "Emperor's New Clothes." The tale goes as follows: the Emperor lies on his bed, and Death sits on his chest and begins taking away his power. However, the life-giving nightingale begins to sing causing Death to return the Emperor's crown and sword. Voegelin describes the tension he felt as the "sweet anguish between Death and Life."⁴⁴

He explains the importance of these reflections: "A philosopher had to engage in an anamnestic exploration of his own consciousness in order to discover its constitution by his own experience of reality if he wanted to be critically aware of what he was doing."⁴⁵ These childhood explorations were especially important for Voegelin. Simply reflecting on recent learning and political events were not enough for they were the very things that needed clarification. These twenty accounts were immediately able to be recalled because they were in fact "living forces in the present constitution of consciousness."⁴⁶ For Voegelin, reality is not constructed by man but is rather experienced by participating in it.⁴⁷ Thus, in order to express reality, man must explore the reality he participates in. And this participation can only come through his own

⁴⁴ Ibid., 97.

⁴⁵ Voegelin, "Remembrance of Things Past," 313.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 314.

⁴⁷ Reality cannot be a construction of human reality for consciousness itself is a part of reality for Voegelin. Consciousness is a result of noetic interpretation of reality. Voegelin writes, "For the symbols of noetic exegesis [including consciousness itself] are not in fact developed as concepts referring to non-noetic objects but, instead, arise in the meditative process as termini whereby the noetic experience interprets itself." Reality also defines the very limits of consciousness. Voegelin expressed these limits as tensional poles of reality (e.g. life and death). Through participating in reality between these limits, consciousness experiences these poles as markers that define reality and its borders. "What is Political Reality," 350.

concrete consciousness. Thus, these childhood experiences of reality (and even transcendence) and *their continuation in his adult consciousness* are vitally important. They are important because they demonstrate the constitution of consciousness itself. The reason for their continuation in his memory is because the truth induced by his childhood experience is a permanent part of the constitution of his consciousness.

Voegelin's Theory of Consciousness

How did Voegelin describe this process of human consciousness? The “noetic interpretation,” as he called it, arises when man’s consciousness becomes restless. This feeling sparks a search for the ground of existence.⁴⁸ Eighteenth-century philosopher Gottfried Leibniz expressed the movement precisely: “Why is there something rather than nothing?” This process of being drawn to the “ground” is one of the most basic of human experiences.⁴⁹ And it has had many formulations—Plato’s love for wisdom; St. Paul’s faith, hope, and love; and St. Augustine’s *amor Dei* (love of God).

This search does not occur in a vacuum; rather, man finds himself within a historical context, already being formed by a narrative that seeks to explain the whole of existence (cosmological myth, Greek philosophy, Christian theology). As Voegelin writes, “For man does not wait for science to have his life explained to him.”⁵⁰

The search for the ground begins at the point of existential crisis or ignorance about man’s existence. This sense of restlessness is caused in part by an increasing frustration with these self-interpreting narratives (e.g. Aristotle’s frustration with the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 346.

⁴⁹ See Voegelin, “In Search of the Ground,” 224-51.

⁵⁰ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 27.

Ionian myth). But perhaps more importantly, it symbolizes an initial movement of “being drawn” (*helkein*) by the divine, as in Plato’s parable of the cave. This search is not directionless. To the contrary, man is drawn *towards* the ground. This restlessness, or anxiety, is both a divine and a human movement. Man begins searching because of an existential crisis. God begins pulling man to himself. In classical philosophy, the term “reason” expressed this divine-human movement. The term “reason” was referenced to both the human ascent (*nous*) and the divine ground itself (*Nous*). In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle writes: “Thought (*nous*) thinks itself through participation (*metalepsis*) in the object of thought (*noeton*); for it becomes the object of thought (*noetos*) through being touched and thought, so that thought (*nous*) and that which is thought (*noeton*) are the same.”⁵¹ This movement leads to a mystical communion between human consciousness and the divine ground. This event is symbolized by Aristotle as participation (*metalepsis*), or in Plato, as the “In-Between” (*metaxy*). In *The Laws*, Plato developed a myth that expressed reason as this luminous event.⁵² The myth describes a Puppet Player who pulls the human puppets by various metal chords, one of which is the gold chord of Reason. Thus, reason itself serves as a mystical, divine-human event.

This journey, or search, for the ground that we have discussed readily leads to reflection on the order of being, what Voegelin calls “noetic interpretation.” As man journeys toward the divine ground, he naturally becomes cognizant of elements (and their nature) in the order of being. For example, the divine ground is outside of space and

⁵¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1072b20ff translated in Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4: *The Ecumenic Age*, vol. 17, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Michael Franz (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 250.

⁵² Plato, *The Laws*, translated by Thomas Pangle (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 644d-645d.

time. The cosmos is in space and time. Man is mortal, because we experience birth and death. God is immortal for he existed before creation and is our eternal *telos*, and so forth.

Yet how can man know⁵³ the whole of reality? How can man know the eternal and transcendent ground of existence? How can an entity bound by space and time know the essence of other “things” in space and time, let alone have knowledge of “things” outside space and time? The answer is that man participates in the whole of reality.

A crucial point must be made: man knows by participation from “within” not from “without.”⁵⁴ That is to say, man knows reality, not as a man who somehow stands outside of reality and views it as an object, but rather as a participant in the Whole. Voegelin defines reality as a primordial community of being consisting of “God and man, world and society.”⁵⁵ It is all encompassing; an individual has no outside vantage point to apprehend it as an object, because he is necessarily within it.

Voegelin describes reality metaphorically as a play: “He [man] is an actor, playing a part in the drama of being and, through the brute fact of existence, committed to play it without knowing what it is.”⁵⁶ To expound on this metaphor, the actor is not an outside spectator observing reality from his box-seat but rather is on stage performing,

⁵³ Since man can only participate in reality as a subject and not an object, complete knowledge of reality is beyond our abilities (another limit of consciousness). But this limitation of knowledge should not be confused with lack of true knowledge: “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.” Voegelin, *Order and History, vol. 1: Israel and Revelation*, , vol. 14, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Maurice Hogan (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 40-41.

⁵⁴ For this distinction between participation from “within” and from “without” see Voegelin, “What is Political Reality,” 373-74.

⁵⁵ Voegelin, *Order and History, vol. 1: Israel and Revelation*, 39.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

participating in the Whole by virtue of simply existing. It is only through this participation that the actor finds his role in the drama. Man becomes conscious of himself as “man” only by participating in the Whole. An actor cannot be identified apart from his role in the play, thus “man” symbolizes his participation in the larger Whole. To isolate man apart from this larger reality is to lose the ability to know man *qua* man. This participation in the Whole is what Voegelin calls “It-reality,” as opposed to “thing-reality,” where man, as an outside spectator, views reality as an object.⁵⁷

In answer to the question about the knowledge of being, man can have knowledge (though incomplete) of the whole of reality, because he participates in the Whole. It is through this participation that man realizes that he is not animal, nor god, but indeed man. But how does man participate in the Whole?

Man participates in the Whole, because he experiences the entire order of being in his own consciousness. One of Voegelin’s most helpful contributions was his description (and clarification) of the classical Greek order of being (see Table 1).⁵⁸ In ascending fashion, this hierarchical order is expressed as the depth (*apeiron*), inorganic nature, vegetative nature, animal nature, the psyche (the passions and reason), and the divine *Nous*. Man is in part matter (hair, bone, skin). These properties are not exclusive to man but are common to all corporeal objects (rocks, plants, animals). Man also grows and processes food, similar to plant-life. Further, man possesses certain desires that are mutually sought after by animals. Yet in all this man has unique passions and reason

⁵⁷ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 5: *In Search of Order*, vol. 18, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 28-31.

⁵⁸ Voegelin, “Reason: The Classic Experience,” in *Published Essays 1966-1985*, vol. 12, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1990), 289-91.

(*nous*). Through self-reflection man becomes aware of this hierarchical structure. And the higher elements of being are superior in part because they are more exclusive.

Table 1. Levels of Being⁵⁹

The Order of Being	The Human Soul
Divine-Nous	<i>Transcendent Pole</i>
<i>Psyche</i> -Noetic	↑
<i>Psyche</i> -Passions	
Animal Nature	
Vegetative Nature	
Inorganic Nature	↓
Apeiron-Depth	<i>Transcendent Pole</i>

But man is also a being who yearns for a completion that is outside of himself. Thus, within human experience, man is seemingly pulled toward an ineffable, transcendental pole, the noetic height. This pole corresponds to the search for the ground discussed earlier, namely the journey toward God. Man, however, is also pulled in an opposite direction toward another pole, the apeironic depth, which means nothingness or separation. For Voegelin, this type of participation (via reason) is uniquely human, distinguishing us from animals and the divine. This participation takes place in the “In-

⁵⁹ This diagram is a modified version of Voegelin’s diagram in “Reason: The Classic Experience,” 289-91. The major modification from the original diagram is a removal of two columns—society and history—from Voegelin’s three column diagram. Voegelin had these three columns to represent the essential aspects of human existence (the human soul, society, and history). That is to say, man is not an isolated individual. Rather, he is a participant in society and history. These columns were not removed based on any rejection of their essentiality, for this essay assumes them. Rather, they were removed because the historical and societal dimensions of man’s existence will be covered in the next chapter.

Between” (*metaxy*), literally in between the animal and the divine. Thus, man participates in the whole of reality by possessing within himself the parts of the human soul and the pulls toward transcendence. These tensional poles are not objects existing in space and time. Rather, they are transcendental markers pointing toward an existential pull. To illustrate the point, think about the Equator, the North Pole, and the South Pole as geographical markers. These markers are not objects that could be located when one traveled to those locations. Rather, they serve as geographical locators, similar to these tensional poles.

Though reality is not an object with man as its subject, Voegelin recognizes a tension in man’s consciousness itself that inevitably causes philosophical tension (another advancement beyond Aristotle’s theory). The human consciousness experiences and expresses reality in ways that bring about this internal tension. Voegelin expressed this paradoxical structure through the symbols “intentionality” and “luminosity.”⁶⁰ Human consciousness is located in a concrete individual (the subject), and reality inevitably is viewed as an object. As Voegelin writes, “Consciousness is always consciousness-of-something.”⁶¹ This formula expresses the intentionality of consciousness—that is, viewing reality as an object or “thing-reality.” This expression is exactly the concern in the previous discussion of Voegelin’s definition of reality, that is—knowledge of reality must come from “within” not from “without.” And man can view reality from “within” through the luminosity of consciousness. Though man’s consciousness can view intentionally, this concrete consciousness is also real and part of the larger reality as expressed in the play metaphor. And it is this knowledge that expresses the luminosity of

⁶⁰ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 5: *In Search of Order*, 28-31.

⁶¹ Voegelin. “What is Political Reality,” 365.

consciousness. In the luminosity of consciousness, reality is no longer the object of study but rather becomes the subject. And the subject (the individual) becomes the predicate. Thus, reality becomes “It-reality,” understood in its comprehensive sense, including man as a participant from within. One commentator on Voegelin aptly illustrates man’s participation in “It-reality” using marriage as an analogy.⁶² Just as it would be faulty to think of a spouse as only one part of the marriage, it would be equally as wrong to view man’s participation in reality as merely a part of the larger whole. A part does not contain the whole (e.g. the arm to the body). But it is essential that man contain, or at least apprehend, the whole in which he participates within himself, either in marriage or in reality. The marriage itself exists in its wholeness in both spouses. As Robert McMahon writes, “A husband, for example, is conscious not only of his own views with respect to his marriage but also of his wife’s; he is thereby aware of how their views relate, and fail to relate, to one another, and from this arises the tension of a marriage.”⁶³

Through this experience of participation, man becomes aware of an ineffable reality. Yet this experience of reality must be expressed in order to rightly order the *polis*. As Plato writes, the city is the soul of man writ large. Thus, the order of reality in man ought to correlate to the order of the *polis*. The noetic interpretation of man’s participation in reality forms the concepts and symbols of political philosophy. The concepts are expressions of intentionality; symbols express luminosity.⁶⁴ That is to say,

⁶² Robert McMahon, “Eric Voegelin’s Paradoxes of Consciousness and Participation,” *Review of Politics* 61 (1999): 117-39.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 117-18.

⁶⁴ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 5: *In Search of Order*, 28-31.

concepts relate to objects existing in space and time (intentionality); symbols relate to non-existent reality—that is, objects outside in space and time (luminosity).

To elucidate further, Voegelin defines symbols as markers that describe some aspect of man's participation in reality (God and man, world and society). Symbols are not concepts referring to objects existing in space and time but are carriers of a transcendent truth.⁶⁵ An essential connection exists between man's experience of reality and the symbols that are engendered by that experience. This connection is in part because symbols are known only through participation. Thus, the symbols can only be understood within the experience that engendered the symbols themselves.

Take the symbol "man" as an example. On the one hand, it appears simple enough that man is indeed a concept—that is, an object in space and time. On the other hand, it is not quite that easy, unless one is willing to grant that man is purely material. If one were asked to point to man's soul (as an object), could it be done? Even if this task could be accomplished (an assured impossibility), could one point to the different parts of the soul (e.g. the passions)? Thus, one must either conclude that man has no soul (as many do) or acknowledge that the soul is a symbol describing something that is experientially true, though empirically unverifiable. That is to say, man can only know the soul by participating in reality not by viewing reality from outside as an object. In drawing an analogy between Voegelin's symbol and glass-lenses, philosopher Eugene Webb writes, "[I]t [symbol] is not, when it is functioning properly, an object of attention in its own right, but serves as a focusing device to direct attention beyond itself toward

⁶⁵ Voegelin, "Immortality: Experience and Symbol," in *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence Between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin 1934-1964*, edited by Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 177.

the object of interest.”⁶⁶ Even though this analogy illustrates the point, it is important to note that Webb’s analogy breaks down in that reality is not an object (i.e. “thing-reality”) but rather is the subject (i.e. “It-reality”).

Once removed from their original experience, these symbols are easily turned into concepts, or ideas, that refer to objects.⁶⁷ The concepts are accepted as the truth about reality, but they are accepted as true apart from any account of the Whole. In other words, they are believed as propositions but are not rooted in any experiential meditation on participation in the larger order of being. Once reality is regarded as an object, the concepts are either believed in a fideistic fashion or rejected by skepticism. Voegelin writes, “[w]hen the symbol separates from its source in the experiential [participation in reality], the Word of God can degenerate into a word of man that one can believe or not.”⁶⁸

Implications for the Relationship between Greek Philosophy and Christianity

As a conclusion, it would be helpful to tie this chapter’s discussion of Voegelin’s recovery of transcendence back into the larger question of this thesis: “why would a thinker who acknowledges the epochal significance of Christian revelation give primacy

⁶⁶ Eugene Webb, *Eric Voegelin: Philosopher of History* (Seattle, Wa.: University of Washington Press, 1981), 101.

⁶⁷ Though reality is not an object with man as its subject, Voegelin recognizes a tension in man’s consciousness itself that inevitably causes tension in this regard. The human consciousness experiences and expresses reality in ways that bring about this internal tension. Voegelin expressed this paradoxical structure through the symbols “intentionality” and “luminosity.” Human consciousness is located in a concrete individual (the subject), and reality becomes its object. As Voegelin writes, “Consciousness is always consciousness-of-something.” This formula expresses the intentionality of consciousness—that is, viewing reality as an object or “thing-reality.” This expression is exactly the concern in the previous discussion of Voegelin’s definition of reality. Yet this concrete consciousness is also real and part of the larger reality as expressed in the play metaphor. This expresses the luminosity of consciousness. For Voegelin on intentionality and luminosity see *Order and History*, vol. 5: *In Search of Order*.

⁶⁸ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4: *The Ecumenic Age*, 105.

to the Greeks in his search for clarity about human consciousness and political order?” It is important to establish that in fact Voegelin gives primacy to the Greeks. He not only diagnosed the modern problem early in his career (though not as developed as his later work) but also prescribed a recovery of transcendence without much mention of Christianity. Voegelin rebuked both political mass movements and political science for eclipsing the larger horizons of the order of being. And then he sought to proscribe a political philosophy grounded in a proper order of being that encompassed the whole of reality. In demonstrating Nazi Germany’s distortion of reality, he did use the larger horizons expressed in the religious-politics of ancient Israel, namely the mediatorial role of Moses between God and Israel. But this could hardly be counted as Christian *per se*. Even his example of Israel was not exclusive; he also discussed ancient Egyptian mythology. The point could have been made even without Israel. Though Voegelin did argue that Nazism was a religion, he did not intend for this prescription to be taken in a narrow sense, denoting prayer or church attendance, but more broadly to denote a construction of reality, an existential representation. Furthermore, Voegelin’s theory of consciousness is explicitly, and unapologetically, rooted in a classical Greek ordering of the human soul. The clearest example is his reliance on the Aristotelian-Platonic articulation of the order of being (see Figure 1). There is no mention of Christ, Paul, or the early church fathers on this major theory in Voegelin’s political philosophy.

Voegelin’s theory of consciousness highlights the first partial answer to the thesis question (mentioned in the introduction)—that is, he believes that the noetic differentiation articulated by philosophy is in fact clearer at some points in expressing the order of reality than Christian revelation. And it is this order of being, demonstrated in

his theory of consciousness, that exemplifies this clarity. As a matter of fact, Voegelin will later claim that Christianity actually absorbed this noetic analysis of being, but with less noetic control than the Greeks.

What are the implications for this seeming absence of Christianity in his therapy of order? It could perhaps demonstrate Voegelin's belief that Christianity provides no political contributions, despite its maximal differentiation (the first proposed hypothesis in the introduction). But this lack of discussion of Christian revelation is not necessarily an indication of its apolitical nature. Even in his earliest writings, he made reference to Christianity, even if it discussed less extensively than Greek philosophy. At this point, there does not appear to be any sense in which Christianity can be considered a culprit in these modern political pathologies. To the contrary, in *The Political Religions*, he identifies Nazi Germany as an "anti-Christian religious movement." Yet there seems to be no indication that Voegelin is attempting to restore political order through Christianity either. At this point, any conclusion would be unsatisfactory. This larger question, however, will continue to drive the discussion of subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

The Recovery of Transcendence: A Theory of History

The order of history emerges from the history of order.

—Eric Voegelin, *Order and History: Israel and Revelation*

As discussed in the previous chapter, Voegelin attempted to restore order amidst chaos. Thus far, this recovery of transcendence has been articulated through Voegelin's theory of consciousness, the order of the soul. But man does not exist as an isolated individual, a lonely soul floating in space. He exists in a society within a larger field of history. Thus, any effective attempt at a restoration of order must articulate some theory of history.

Voegelin's Theory of History

Given this need, the question arises: how does man order history? How should a seemingly infinite amount of historical material be ordered and ranked? What should be left out and what should be included? For Voegelin, history should be ordered as man and society are ordered—that is, from within. Just as man has no vantage point from outside of reality by which to know it, so too man does not possess a bird's eye perspective on history. Man rather lives in history, not outside it. Thus, there is no ideology or philosophy by which man can interpret the historical material. Just as man knows reality through participating in it (discussed in the previous chapter), so he too can

only know history by participating in it. Echoing an Augustinian reading of history,¹ Voegelin argues that history is the soul of man writ large. In other words, the same tension found in human existence and the same transcendent poles that pull man are found writ large in the structure of history itself (See Table 2). And this finding is not an ideology imposed from outside of history but rather emerges from a reading of the empirical data from *within* history. Voegelin writes, “The order of history emerges from the history of order.”² Any ordering of history (e.g. to offer a single timeline of progress) should be built on the various expressions of reality found in civilizations throughout human history.

Table 2. Structure of Man and History

The Order of Being	The Human Soul	History
Afterlife/Beyond	<i>Transcendent Pole</i> ↑	<i>Transcendent Pole</i> ↑
<i>In-Between</i>		
↓	↓	
Birth/Beginning	<i>Transcendent Pole</i>	<i>Transcendent Pole</i>

This correlation between personal existence and history is perhaps not immediately evident. Voegelin defines personal existence as fundamentally in tension; it is “In-between.” Man exists in a state of pull and counter-pull. He experiences the

¹ Eric Voegelin, “Immortality: Experience and Symbol,” in *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin 1934-1964*, edited by Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 78.

² Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 1: *Israel and Revelation*, vol. 14, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Maurice Hogan (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 19.

tension between time and timelessness, mortality and immortality, imperfection and perfection. Though this tensional existence is the human condition, man also feels a movement toward a state of transcendence and immortality that goes beyond the present structure. In Christianity, this perfection that transcends the human condition is achieved through physical death.³

But how does this structure of human existence apply to history? What structure is there in history to discover that corresponds to the human soul? If Voegelin's theory is a correct reading of reality, these same structures of personal existence (the "In-between," the pull and counter-pull, and a directional movement toward immortality) ought to emerge in the structure of history as well. And they do. History is indeed "In-between." The sense of a beginning and an end, a creation and a new creation, permeates the historical record. Civilizations from every age have addressed these central questions: Where did we come from? And where are we going? Voegelin labeled these searches as the Beginning and the Beyond. The Beginning is one mode of experiencing reality. It emphasizes the creational origins of existence and is expressed in a variety of creation myths. Since it is not part of our current existence, it is only known through the mediating "experience of the existence and intelligible structure of things in the cosmos."⁴

Another mode of experiencing reality is the Beyond. It emphasizes the eschatological direction of history itself. This end is only known by participating in the whole of reality. Voegelin writes, "The movement toward the Beyond of the cosmos can

³ Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism* (Wilmington, De.: ISI Books, 2004).

⁴ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4: *The Ecumenic Age*, vol. 17, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Michael Franz (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri, 2000), 62.

become fully articulate only when the Beyond itself has revealed itself.”⁵ Thus, similar to the tension in human existence between life and death, history is also held in tension between the two transcendent poles of the Beginning and the Beyond. Just as personal existence is “In-between” birth and death, so history finds itself “In-between” its genesis and its end.

Yet as mentioned earlier, history is not static. Just as man is moving toward immortality beyond the present structure, history is moving in an eschatological direction. Certain factors that provide change are introduced in history. Voegelin argued that history should be a documentation of these changes of our knowledge of reality, not merely a series of chronological events. He writes:

[I]t will have become clear that a philosophy of history cannot be an amiable record of memorabilia, in the hope that the passions that have caused phenomena of the past to survive in the memory of mankind were judicious in their choice. It must be a critical study of the authoritative structure in the history of mankind . . . A study that wants to be critical must take seriously the fact that the truth about the order of being emerges in the order of history.⁶

History is not a collection of random facts. It is rather a recognition of the clarification in man’s understanding of reality (and man’s perversion of that same understanding) that corresponds to this sense of beginning and beyond in individual human consciousness. Thus, it is this awareness of being that should order events in history. There are two qualifiers to this statement that guard against a false philosophy of history and subsequent derailment into untruth.⁷ First, the truth that is accessible to human consciousness is only

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 2: *The World of the Polis*, vol. 15, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Athanasios Moulakis (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 73.

⁷ Voegelin, “Experience and Symbolization in History,” *Published Essays 1966-1985*, vol. 12, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1990), 120-21.

partial, only perspectival. There is no vantage point by which man can transcend his perspective and view reality from afar. Yet he can gain perspective that transcends *his* place, time, and situation. This acknowledgement provides the foundation for an intellectual humility. Second, since this understanding emerges in history, man can never claim to hold the ultimate Truth. Voegelin writes, “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* [italics added].”⁸ Even today, man cannot expect to possess complete truth but should anticipate further insight into the human condition.

Excursus: Shifts in Voegelin’s Theory of History

This brief summary of Voegelin’s philosophy of history is illustrative of his most mature work. Before discussing it further, it is important to document two significant shifts in his intellectual development that culminated in this later philosophy. In attempting to provide an alternative to two major introductory volumes in political philosophy,⁹ McGraw-Hill publishers approached Voegelin to write a history of political ideas. If one knows anything about Voegelin, a proposed concise introductory volume to political thought seems ludicrous. One would expect it to turn into a ground-breaking, multi-volume work, and this is exactly what happened. Part of this expectation comes from Voegelin’s work habits. Ellis Sandoz documents them: “he gets up at 7:30 a.m. and seldom goes to bed before 2:00 a.m., only taking time out during the day for a nap after

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ George H. Sabine, *History of Political Theory* (New York, N.Y.: Holt, 1950); William A. Dunning, *A History of Political Theories*, vol. 1-3 (New York, N.Y.: Macmillan, 1902-20).

lunch. This eighteen hour day is a regimen he has followed for decades.”¹⁰ On this one project alone, this work habit produced over four thousand pages of typescript spanning the course of fifteen years. Except for one book that covers the Enlightenment,¹¹ this massive project was abandoned and unpublished in Voegelin’s lifetime. (The entire eight-volume collection was recently published by the University of Missouri Press.)¹²

Voegelin abandoned the project because he came to the conclusion that the very notion of a history of ideas was flawed. He writes, “On occasion of the chapter of Schelling it dawned on me that the conception of a history of ideas was an ideological deformation of reality. There were no ideas unless there were symbols of immediate experiences.”¹³ In other words, Voegelin argued that there were no ideas, no concepts, removed from their experiential origin. This very notion of concept (as discussed in my last chapter) distorts

¹⁰ Ellis Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution*, 2nd edition (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 76.

¹¹ Voegelin, *From Enlightenment to Revolution*, edited by John H. Hallowell (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1975).

¹² Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, vol. 1: Hellenism, Rome, and Early Christianity, vol. 19, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Athanasios Moulakis (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1997); *History of Political Ideas*, vol. 2: The Middle Ages to Aquinas, vol. 20, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Peter von Sievers (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1997); *History of Political Ideas*, vol. 3: The Later Middle Ages, vol. 21, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by David Walsh (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1998); *History of Political Ideas*, vol. 4: The Renaissance and Reformation, vol. 22, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by David L. Morse and William M. Thompson (Columiba, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1998); *History of Political Ideas*, vol. 5: Religion and the Rise of Modernity, vol. 23, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by James L. Wiser (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1998); *History of Political Ideas*, vol. 6: Revolution and the New Science, vol. 24, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Barry Cooper (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1998); *History of Political Ideas*, vol. 7: The New Order and Last Orientation, vol. 25, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Jürgen Gebhardt and Thomas A. Hollweck (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1999); *History of Political Ideas*, vol. 8: Crisis and the Apocalypse of Man, vol. 26, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by David Walsh (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1999).

¹³ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1989), 64.

reality itself. This realization came prior to much of the discussion of the previous chapter, particularly the portions dealing with his theory of consciousness.

Voegelin's shift then led to another massive project—*Order and History*. This history of political philosophy was intended to fill six volumes.¹⁴ The original list was as follows: Israel and Revelation; The World of the Polis; Plato and Aristotle; Empire and Christianity; The Protestant Centuries; and The Crisis of Western Civilization. These volumes would not track the historical progress of ideas but would rather examine the emerging expression of reality (God and man, world and society) throughout the world's myths and symbols. However, during a seventeen year break between volume three (Plato and Aristotle) and the anticipated fourth volume (Empire and Christianity), Voegelin recognized the need for another shift, if it can be called that, in his philosophy of history.¹⁵ Well into the second volume, Voegelin became aware that the structure of history that had emerged was more complicated than he originally believed.¹⁶ This complication arose when the overwhelming empirical data investigated was placed in the constraining nature of Voegelin's original five types of order (Ancient Near East, Israel, Hellenic polis, multi-civilizational empires, and the modern nation-state). Further, the impossibility of incorporating this new data into a single course of history proved fatal. In other words, history could not be constructed, without ideological deformation, on a linear time line climaxing in our current age. Thus, Voegelin concluded that these

¹⁴ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 1: *Israel and Revelation*, 20.

¹⁵ It is important to note that the first shift was indeed a *break* from his earlier work, while this second shift was more of a conscious realization of patterns that he had already identified earlier. For example, Voegelin had identified in an earlier volume parallel outbursts of knowledge both in the Hebraic nation and the Hellenic polis.

¹⁶ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4: *The Ecumenic Age*, 46.

various parallel advances could not be placed on a single time-line but could only be seen in, what Voegelin called, “cross-cut patterns” or a “web of meaning.”¹⁷

The Differentiation of Reality in History

How would Voegelin articulate this web of history? How would he rank and order this vast amount of empirical data? Though his mature philosophy of history moved away from a single course of history, the process from compact myth to differentiation, or the emergence of truth in time, remained. Voegelin argued that reality consists of a “primordial community of being.”¹⁸ This fundamental reality (God and man, world and society) is experienced and expressed in civilizations throughout world history. This knowledge is based on man’s participation in the reality (as discussed in the previous chapter) and is neither complete truth nor complete ignorance. Just as man discovers himself as time passes, so too does clarification of being emerge in time. This process of differentiation can be illustrated by documenting the progress of a novice wine drinker toward what we might call mature taste. Let us assume that he continues to drink from the same wine bottle. As a novice, when asked what he tastes, he will simply say wine. His taste buds have not matured to the point of being able to distinguish between the various flavors in the wine. The taste comes across as a unified whole—it tastes like wine. However, as his taste buds mature, he will increasingly become able to identify the oak, the cherry, or a host of other distinct flavors in the same wine that he had tasted as a novice.

¹⁷ Ibid., 106.

¹⁸ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 1: *Israel and Revelation*, 39.

Similarly reality was first perceived in compact fashion. This experience can be found in myths throughout the ancient Near East and the Far East. Much like the novice wine drinker, they were not able to distinguish between the various elements as later expressions would, though all the elements of reality (God and man, world and society) were present in their compact experience. The experience of reality came across as a unified whole—the cosmos. In short, these compact myths are best described as microcosms. They serve as analogies to the larger structure of the world. Voegelin provides four major characteristics of these early symbolizations: the predominance of the experience of participation; the preoccupation with the lasting and passing of the partners in being; the essentially unknowable order of being made intelligible by symbolization; and the awareness of the analogical character of the symbols themselves.¹⁹

The predominance of the experience emphasizes the oneness of reality. In other words, the participant in reality emphasizes the event itself over and against any further reflection or differentiation of the elements of reality. Thus, the myth is expressed in compact form, emphasizing its consubstantiality over and against any separateness. The limitation on this compact experience is not due to reality itself. There is no part of reality that the participant is not experiencing. Man participates in the whole of reality. The differentiation comes mysteriously usually fostered by disorder. In similar fashion, the wine tasted by the novice wine drinker is not defective wine; there is no part of the wine that is not tasted. The limitation is located elsewhere, in this case the maturity of the taster.

¹⁹ Ibid., 41-45.

In the compact myth, the method for distinguishing between the partners in being (God and man, world and society) is their relative existence to one another. For example, the everlasting nature of the gods, when compared with the passing nature of man, provides justification for a hierarchy of being within the cosmos. Another factor for the hierarchical structure is the level by which one possesses fantastical powers and abilities. This hierarchical reality is not to be confused with distinguishing between transcendence and immanence. Such distinctions are characteristic of a fuller differentiation expressed in later philosophy and theology.

The compact myth did not provide complete knowledge, because it articulated the experience by analogy, an analogy to the world. Thus, the rule of the Pharaoh expressed the rule of the gods by analogy. The festivals of the city-state were coordinated around the natural seasons. Even the gods themselves were viewed as physical and material beings. For example, the *Enuma Elish* describes the world as molded from the body of the divine Tiamat:

When Tiamat opened her mouth to consume him,
 He drove in the Evil Wind that she close not her lips.
 As the fierce winds charged her belly,
 Her body was distended and her mouth
 was wide open.
 He released the arrow, it tore her belly,
 It cut through her insides, splitting the heart.
 Having thus subdued her, he extinguished her life . . .
 He split her like a shellfish into two parts:
 Half of her he set up and ceiled it as sky,
 Pulled down the bar and posted guards.
 He bade them to allow not her waters to escape.²⁰

²⁰ "The Creation Epic," in *The Ancient Near East, vol. 1, An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, edited by James Pritchard (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958).

This fallen divine becomes the material substance that forms the cosmos. The warrior opens her carcass and spans her body to form the sky, the sea, and the land.

Finally, this analogical expression of reality provided a rich context for pluralism and tolerance. This context was provided by an understanding that there was no one truth, or exhaustive knowledge, but that all myths were analogical expressions of an ineffable reality.

These ancient civilizations structured their political order to this cosmic myth.

Voegelin characterizes their political order as follows:

Rulership becomes the task of securing the order of society in harmony with cosmic order; the territory of the empire is analogical representation of the world with its four quarters; the great ceremonies of the empire represent the rhythm of the cosmos; festivals and sacrifices are a cosmic liturgy, a symbolic participation of the cosmion in the cosmos; and the ruler himself represents the society, because on earth he represents the transcendent power which maintains cosmic order.²¹

One example of such order is found in the political order of Mesopotamia.²² Voegelin describes the first Babylonian Dynasty as comprising many city-states that consisted of several farms. On these farms, religious temples were constructed. These farms were said to have been owned by gods who then delegated administrative duties to farmers. This delegation is expressed in this ancient inscription: “When Enlil, king of all countries, had given the kingship of the land to Lugalzaggisi; When Enlil had directed the eyes of the land toward him, and had laid all countries at his feet.”²³ These smaller farms then were under the rule of the tenet farmer of the highest god in the city. This

²¹ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 54.

²² Voegelin, *Order and History, vol. 1: Israel and Revelation*, 55-84.

²³ *Ibid.*, 63.

hierarchical structure in the Mesopotamian city-states reflected analogously the hierarchical structure of the gods and the cosmos.

Yet the cosmological foundation of these civilizations crumbled along with the city-states. According to Voegelin, the compact expression of reality began to falter because it failed to express adequately the experience of reality. For example, the notion of a hierarchy of being based simply on longevity of experience or degrees of abilities increasingly became an unsatisfactory way to express the difference between the gods and man. The difference between the gods and man appeared much more significant.

New symbolic expressions began to develop that provided a more differentiated, and thus superior, means of expression. According to Voegelin, this breakdown of the cosmion led to the development of a more lasting foundation than analogies to the visible world.²⁴ These new expressions relied on the notions of transcendence and immanence. Throughout various cultures separated by thousands of miles, this further differentiation occurred. During the period between 800-300 B.C., these “spiritual outbursts” occurred in places such as China (Confucianism), India (Buddhism), Persia (Zoroastrianism), Israel (Moses), and Hellas (Socrates).²⁵ Breaking from the compact myth of ancient Egypt, Moses encountered the transcendent God (I AM THAT I AM) in the burning bush. The Greek philosopher Xenophanes ridiculed the concept of the almost human-like gods (i.e. compact myth) and argued instead that the divine was the one, hidden God. In the *Enuma Elish*, cosmogony and theogony were inseparably linked, but the Israelite creation account clearly distinguished between the two: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (out of nothing).” This distinction between the immanent

²⁴ Ibid., 44.

²⁵ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 60-61.

world and the transcendent divine in effect “de-divinized” the world in contrast to the divinized cosmos of ancient myth. Much like the novice wine drinker who at one point could now distinguish between various flavors of the wine, man could articulate a differentiated reality. And thus, these compact myths became unsatisfying as symbolic expressions by which to order society. However, it is at this point that the wine analogy begins to break down. The gods are found to be not just a flavor within the wine but something categorically different. Yet the gods are not somehow outside of reality.

This differentiation resulted in political societies being viewed as a macroanthropos instead of a microcosm—that is, a small-scale analog to the larger structure of the world. This shift was the result of another illumination, namely that human consciousness itself is the locus for experiencing the cosmos and where reality becomes luminous to itself.²⁶ Thus, Plato’s often-quoted phrase, “the city is man writ large,” encapsulates the theory of this period. Instead of ordering the *polis* to an analogical representation of the cosmos, the *polis* was ordered to the human soul.

²⁶ Voegelin, “On the Theory of Consciousness,” in *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics*, vol. 6, edited by David Walsh (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2002).

This differentiation of reality does not alter reality itself, however.²⁷ Voegelin writes, “We obviously do not wish to imply that it is reality that has changed, but only our conception of it.”²⁸ Voegelin is clear: when a human consciousness receives a differentiated understanding of the primordial community (God and man, world and society), it is only the perception of reality that is altered not reality *qua* reality. This conclusion is also consistent with the role that symbols play in expressing reality. Luminous symbols that express reality do so as man is viewed within “It-reality.” In other words, these symbols do not express real objects that can or cannot be altered in space and time. Rather, they express more or less clear expressions of “It-reality.” For example, a change from myth (pre-noetic) to philosophy (noetic) only expresses a shift from a compact to a differentiated symbolic expression of reality, nothing more. It is not as though the cosmic gods suddenly escaped their material existence and transcended immanent reality. Further, Voegelin argues that it is when man believes that reality itself has changed via his participation that perversion ensues: “whereby the changeability experienced in the reality of participation turns into images of a changeable reality

²⁷ Some of Voegelin’s earlier passages might indicate that reality itself does change. For example, Voegelin writes, “And this turning around, this conversion 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, while participation in mundane being recedes to second rank. The more perfect attunement to being through conversion is not an increase on the same scale but a qualitative leap . . . Thus a change in being has actually occurred, with consequences for the order of existence.” Given this earlier evidence, it appears that at best Voegelin is clarifying his earlier analysis and at worst is breaking from his earlier conclusions. Voegelin, *Order and History, vol. 1: Israel and Revelation*, 48. For a scholarly discussion on this point see John W. Corrington, *Order and Consciousness/Consciousness and History: The New Program of Voegelin*, in *Eric Voegelin’s Search for Order in History*, edited by Stephen A. McKnight (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1978); Bruce Douglass, “The Break in Voegelin’s Program,” *Political Science Reviewer* 7 (1977): 1-21; John J. Ranieri, *Eric Voegelin and the Good Society* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1995), 39-45; and Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution*, 121.

²⁸ Voegelin, “What is Political Reality,” in *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics*, vol. 6, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by David Walsh (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 363.

comprising the termini of participation, we find the roots of the phenomena of metastatic faith” (i.e. the modern problem).²⁹ This distortion, or derailment, of reality will be discussed later.

Noetic and Pneumatic Differentiation

This differentiation from the compact myth occurred in two forms: noetic and pneumatic. Before emphasizing their differences, it is important to note that both the noetic and pneumatic expressions of differentiation are in fact quite similar. These two types were not depicted as similarly as they would be in Voegelin’s later work, though they were certainly viewed in a more complementary fashion than most modern thinkers. For example, in his earliest works, he used the terms philosophy and revelation. Yet in his later work, he moved away from this terminology in order to regain their similarity and to avoid being misunderstood. He replaced them with noetic (philosophy) and pneumatic (revelation). For Voegelin, both expressions of reality are indeed theophanies. Whether it is the divine pull (*periagoge*) in Plato’s “Parable of the Cave” or St. John’s analogy of the Spirit drawing man to the Father, neither philosophy nor theology can be viewed as anything other than a divine event. Thus, the philosopher and the theologian are both expressing the same reality and the same divine that they have experienced in their consciousness. He writes, “[T]he 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,’ as the God who is what he is in the concrete theophany to which man responds.”³⁰

²⁹ Voegelin, “What is Political Reality,” 364.

³⁰ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4: *The Ecumenic Age*, 292-93.

The major differences lie chiefly in their accent. The noetic expression accents the “structure in the movement,” whereas the pneumatic accents the “movement in the structure.”³¹ In other words, noetic theophanies exemplified by Greek philosophy place emphasis on the human condition, life in the “In-Between.” Though cognizant of a directional movement in history toward an end, noetic expressions leave this end in mystery, whereas pneumatic theophanies illustrated by Christianity highlight the eschatological and transformational direction of history. Moreover, the noetic accents man’s search for the divine, whereas the pneumatic emphasizes the divine search for man.³² This accent can be demonstrated (and contrasted) by examining their modern reduction—that is to say, making the accent of the mode its essence. In modernity, philosophy is the human search for wisdom, for knowledge. Its essence is human. Any notion of philosophy as divine is rejected. Theology in contrast is defined as an acceptance of a divine word, either spoken or written. Its essence is divine. As modern thought would seek to describe these characteristics as the essence of the discipline, Voegelin attempted to restore these characteristics as accents of theophanies, instead of essences of fundamentally different enterprises.

However, these accents are crucial for understanding the relationship between the two types of differentiation in Voegelin’s political philosophy. As a matter of fact, these very accents are what make pneumatic differentiation prone to imbalance in his view. This intense experience with the divine (e.g. as found in Moses’s encounter) and this emphasis upon the movement of history towards transfiguration can lead to impatience

³¹ Voegelin, “Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme,” in *Published Essays 1966-1985*, vol. 12, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1990), 369.

³² *Ibid.*

with the current human condition in anticipation of the *eschaton*. For example, Voegelin summarizes his reading of the Israelite prophet Isaiah:

In the prophecy of Isaiah we run into the oddity that Isaiah counseled the King of Judah not to rely on the fortifications of Jerusalem and the strength of the army but on his faith in Yahweh. If the king would have the true faith, the God would do the rest by producing an epidemic or a panic among the enemies, and the danger to the city would dissolve. The king had common sense enough not to follow the advice of the prophet, but rather to rely on fortifications and military equipment. Still, there was the prophet's assumption that through an act of faith the structure of reality could be effectively changed.³³

The human condition is situated in the “In-between.” It is filled with struggle, tension, life and death, mortality and immortality. Yet in Voegelin's reading, Isaiah was so caught up in his intense experience of the divine and his expectation of a metastatic, or transformative, occurrence that he believed that “through an act of faith the structure of reality could be effectively changed.” That is to say, Isaiah believed that through this act the “In-between” state of reality could be transformed and that transcendent perfection could become immanent.

This example of imbalance in pneumatic differentiation can be countered by an example of balance in noetic differentiation. According to Voegelin, Plato maintained the “postulate of balance”—that is, “the preservation of the balance between the experienced lastingness [of the human condition] and the theophanic events in such a manner that the paradox becomes intelligible as the very structure of existence itself.”³⁴ In other words, Plato understood that he must express man as “In-between” but also account for the eschatological movement of history. According to Voegelin, he

³³ For Voegelin's full discussion of Isaiah and his metastatic expectation see *Order and History*, vol. 1: *Israel and Revelation*, 529-36. Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 69-70.

³⁴ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4: *The Ecumenic Age*, 291-92.

accomplished this by shrouding the movement in mystery and uncertainties: “his consciousness of the paradox is weighted toward the Anaximandrian mystery of Apeiron and Time, because he refrains from fully unfolding the implications of the directional movement. As a result, the status of the Third God in his conception of history is surrounded by the uncertainties analyzed.”³⁵ This balance is traced to the two accents of the noetic differentiation, namely the emphasis on the structure in the movement (and not the movement itself) and the seemingly less intense encounter with the divine Beyond.

Voegelin's Theory of Equivalence

Returning to the order of history, Voegelin demonstrated that these two types of differentiation cannot be placed on a single time line that moves from compact myths to pneumatic differentiations to noetic differentiations (or from compact myths to noetic differentiations to pneumatic differentiations). As mentioned earlier, these “leaps in being” occurred in various times and cultures that had no contact with one another. Thus, any attempt to chart out a line through history would be a manipulation of the empirical data. For example, the Israelite pneumatic differentiation occurred hundreds of years before the noetic visions of Plato and Aristotle. And it is certainly the case that Greek philosophy preceded the pneumatic outburst of Christianity. Furthermore, various differentiations with no contact such as contemporaries Heraclitus, Buddha, and Confucius cannot be easily situated on a single course of history. Now, this claim is not to deny the impact that some civilizations have upon another. As will be suggested in the next chapter, the incorporation of Greek philosophy (noetic differentiation) into Christianity (pneumatic differentiation) cannot be glossed over.

³⁵ Ibid., 305-06.

These differentiations, even of the same type, build upon their predecessors and further distinguish reality. For example, the emergence of Christianity from the Israelite faith marks a further differentiation.³⁶ In the Israelite expression, God constitutes Israel as his people and covenants with them. Though there were indications of a blessing given to Israel for all nations, this promise was muddled and unclear. It was through Christian revelation that this promise to Abraham was made explicit. Voegelin writes, “With the emergence of the Jewish movement that is called Christianity, Jews and Greeks, Syrians and Egyptians, Romans and Africans could fuse in one mankind under God. In Christianity the separation bore its fruit when the sacred line rejoined mankind.”³⁷

According to Voegelin, this process of differentiation causes heightened tension in history. The tension comes when a “new truth” about reality is discovered. This “new truth” is set against its predecessor—“falsehood.” Voegelin writes, “the enthusiasm of renewal and discovery can be so intense that it will transfigure the new truth into absolute Truth—an ultimate Truth that relegates all previous truth to the state of *pseudos*, a lie.”³⁸ One can recall Israelite prophets condemning the pagan gods as idols, false gods, and proclaiming the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the one true living God. Yet an acknowledgement that this “new truth” actually is part of an emerging process can maintain order and guard against revolution. He continues, “[T]he enthusiasm can also be tempered by awareness that the truth emerging from the process is

³⁶ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 1: *Israel and Revelation*, 182-87.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 187.

³⁸ Voegelin, “Experience and Symbolization in History,” 125.

not entirely new . . . but a differentiated and therefore superior insight into the same reality.”³⁹

This recognition of the emergence of truth in human history is expressed most clearly in Voegelin’s notion of “equivalence.” Voegelin writes:

When we engage in comparative studies concerning ancestor cults, initiation ceremonies, coronation rituals, the myths of life eternal or the judgment of the dead in various societies, we do not talk about 'values' but speak of 'equivalent' cults, ceremonies, rites, and myths. Moreover, in doing so we are aware of the differences between the symbols and we know that the sameness which justifies the language of 'equivalences,' thus, implies the theoretical insight that not the symbols themselves but the constants of engendering experience are the true subject matter of our studies.⁴⁰

In this view, civilizations throughout human history have expressed the common structure of human existence, albeit using different symbols, myths, and philosophies. The equivalence, however, is not to be found in the symbols themselves but rather in the experience that engenders the symbols.⁴¹ Symbols that are being compared can be in contradiction and in direct conflict with one another. Further, symbols are not considered equivalent in their conveyance of truth in terms of differentiation. Voegelin writes, “Neither can the authoritative communications of truth about order, as they have sprung up in the course of history, be sympathetically accepted on equal footing—for that would submerge us in the evils of historicism, in skepticism and relativism.”⁴²

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 115.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 2: *The World of the Polis*, 73.

The equivalence lies in the structure being expressed by the various symbols. The search for the ground” is a case in point.⁴³ Voegelin writes, “The quest of the ground, or ‘search for the ground,’ as I formulate it, is a constant in all civilizations, as also in all subdivisions of civilizations in all societies. That is not to say that the search for the ground, or the expressions of it, always have the same form. As you will see, they sometimes have widely differing forms.”⁴⁴ The search for the ground deals with the questions of existence and essence. In other words, why is there something; why not nothing? And why is that something as it is, and not different? The expression of this search and the ground itself has been expressed in a variety of ways—Heraclitus’ love, hope, and faith; St. Augustine’s *amor dei* (the love of God); Plato’s divine *Nous*; Paul’s *Logos*. Though these symbols express very different concepts or ideas, they are essentially equivalent. That is to say, they essentially express the same movement in the soul of man.

The Derailment of History

Up to this point, history appears to have some sort of progress. Man moves from the compact myth expressed in the ancient world to more differentiated philosophic and theological expressions of reality. Yet as mentioned in the previous chapter this order of man was rejected and replaced with disorder. Man’s journey on this path of truth has been derailed. Unlike the false readings of history that point to our current age as the end of history, Voegelin views this age as an age of disorder, but the modern age is not the

⁴³ Voegelin, “In Search of the Ground,” in *Published Essays 1953-1965*, vol. 11, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 224-51.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

only age that derailed. Voegelin points to many periods in history where the balance of consciousness and the symbolic expressions of reality were distorted.⁴⁵ Thus, history is ranked not merely in the passing of time from past to future but also vertically in relation to its ability to properly express reality and maintain order. But how did man derail, particularly in the modern age? How did these outbursts of insight into the human condition become distorted?

According to Voegelin, this proper ordering was set against the opinion of the philodoxers (lovers of opinion). It is only through ordering the *polis* to the structure of reality that man practices true political science. Given this proper ordering of the *polis*, these expressions provided the world with a proper understanding of reality. However, these expressions did not remain proper for long but were reduced to mere opinion by hypostatization—that is, distorting the order of reality by turning symbols of reality into objects.⁴⁶

Just as these attempts to conform life to the order of being were initiated by a sense of disorder, so too distortions in the order of being begin with a sense of disorder. Participation in reality does not guarantee proper exegesis of it. Due in part to the hypostatization of being, this faulty exegesis places the blame on the structure of being itself.⁴⁷ Thus, the means of salvation is an attempt to obliterate the order of being by constructing false realities, or “second realities,” to obtain order.⁴⁸ In part, these false realities take shape by denying the tensional existence of man, the “In-Between.” These

⁴⁵ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4: *The Ecumenic Age*.

⁴⁶ For an account of the derailment of philosophy see Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*.

⁴⁷ Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, 7-10.

⁴⁸ Voegelin, “What is Political Reality,” 369.

false realities also deny another tension—man’s historical movement from the Beginning to the Beyond. They in turn attempt to immanentize the Beyond, or bring heaven to earth. Thus, derailment ensued. Though these two ways have been distinguished from one another, they should not be considered completely separate. They are inextricably linked. For turning symbols into concepts is already to distort reality. And to distort the order of being assumes that it is a malleable concept.

Underlying the political effects were the second realities of political mass movements Voegelin labeled as Gnostic (Voegelin’s most well-known contribution to understanding the nature of modernity).⁴⁹ This label is in part due to historical connections, but more importantly, it is due to experiential connections. Voegelin argues that the experiential core of Gnosticism, whether ancient or modern, is the feeling of alien-ness in the world.⁵⁰ This feeling in turn spawns a desire to alter this corrupt world through human means. In order for this corruption to be removed, reality (as it is given) must be rejected and replaced by a second reality. Typical of modern Gnosticism is the denial of transcendence, or what Voegelin calls, “the decapitation of being.”⁵¹ Unlike ancient Gnosticism which viewed the transcendent as its escape, modern Gnosticism

⁴⁹ Though Voegelin is well known for his labeling of these political mass movements as Gnostic, he became increasingly aware of other influences on the modern disorder. He writes, “The application of the category of Gnosticism to modern ideologies, of course, still stands. In a more complete analysis, however, there are other factors to be considered in addition.” Two of these include metastatic apocalypse (e.g. Paul) and neo-Platonism (15th century Florence). See *Autobiographical Reflections*, 65-69.

⁵⁰ It should be noted that often theologians familiar with ancient Gnosticism believe Voegelin misunderstands the movement. For Voegelin, modern Gnosticism seeks to escape via immanent means (e.g. politics). Yet ancient Gnosticism sought perfection via transcendent means. Voegelin is well aware of this distinction but believes that this historical movement changed its vehicle of salvation from transcendent means to immanent means. This change is due in part to the immanentizing of the Christian notion of perfection. Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, 7-8.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

views transcendence as its enslaver.⁵² The result was a “re-divinization” of the cosmos as the means of deliverance from disorder through human means.

In political theory, the fundamental change from the classical idea of a *summum bonum* (the greatest good) to Hobbes’s modern notion of a *summum malum* (the greatest evil) provides an example of a second reality and its consequences.⁵³ For Hobbes, the common *telos* of man, the greatest good, is non-existent: “For there is no such *Finis ultimus* (utmost aim) nor *Summum Bonum* (greatest good) as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers.”⁵⁴ Yet with no common end, the problem of ordering political life arises. Because the pre-modern state was to direct man towards his final end, politics must pursue a new goal, since the old one is gone. In Hobbes’s world of conflicting individuals, a mutual fear of death arises as humans seek to fulfill their personal desires. In order to preserve order amidst potential chaos, a great Leviathan is created which orders man based on this mutual fear of the *summum malum*. The state that directed man toward his transcendent end was replaced by a “mortal god”⁵⁵ that protected man at the cost of stripping him of his humanity.

Karl Marx’s political philosophy serves as another example of a second reality.⁵⁶ Marx construed the order of being as purely material. This matter is in a process of becoming. During this process, nature gives birth to man who now assists nature’s

⁵² This shift in the historical movement of Gnosticism is based in part on a perversion of the Christian concept of perfection. This will be discussed in a later chapter. See *Ibid.*, 65-68.

⁵³ For Voegelin’s discussion of Hobbes see *The New Science of Politics*, 180-84.

⁵⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by Edwin Curley (Indianapolis, In.: Hackett, 1994), 57.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁵⁶ See Voegelin’s discussion of Marx in *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, 17-21, 26-34.

progress by his labor. This labor also brings man to his final end. For Marx, this second reality removes any need for the transcendent, because the beginning and beyond of human existence are no longer grounded in a larger horizon of reality but in nature alone. Yet just as in Hobbes, this second reality produced tragic political consequences.

Though there is a comparison that could be made between the metastatic expectations of Isaiah and modern Gnosticism, there are helpful distinctions that can be made. John Ranieri helpfully compares the two. He writes, “Metastasis, then, would seem to derive from a dissatisfaction and impatience with present reality stemming from an intense experience of the world-transcendent God.”⁵⁷ This metastatic expectation is contrasted with Gnosticism: “When the anticipated divine intervention does not occur, apocalyptic vision may give way to an even more pessimistic view of reality in which there is no longer any hope that the present world can be redeemed.”⁵⁸

Voegelin demonstrates the existential roots of the political ideologies by showing their persistence in light of their absurdity.⁵⁹ The modern ideologue prohibits the questioning of his premises as part of his theory. Voegelin later identifies this as “the prohibition of questions.”⁶⁰ Marx writes (Voegelin paraphrasing), “Do not think, do not question me.”⁶¹ Voegelin realized that this “logophobia,”⁶² or fear of philosophy, is at its

⁵⁷ Ranieri, *Eric Voegelin and the Good Society*, 64.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵⁹ Voegelin, “Remembrance of Things Past,” in *Published Essays 1966-1985*, vol. 12, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1990), 307.

⁶⁰ Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, 16.

⁶¹ Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” in *Early Writings*, edited by T. B. Bottomore (New York, n.p., 1964), 166 quoted in *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶² Voegelin, *From Enlightenment to Revolution*, 257-59.

core self-deception, maintained even in light of the theory's absurdity. This self-deception is grounded in the *libido dominandi* (the lust for power), the driving force behind second realities.⁶³ It ultimately was an attempt to kill God in order to become Him. One can already see ahead to Nietzsche's madman crying out "God is dead!"

Political chaos results when reality is distorted. For example, Marx writes, "The struggle against religion is therefore indirectly a struggle against *that world* of which religion is the spiritual *aroma*."⁶⁴ On Voegelin's reading, Marx attempted to murder God in order to save man and create a new world. Yet in this process (as history shows) man was not turned into God but into animal. Ironically, this delusional "murder of God" and subsequent elevation of man to "superman" leads ultimately to the death of man himself. Voegelin writes, "[T]he deicide of the Gnostic theoreticians is followed by the homicide of the revolutionary practitioners."⁶⁵ Given reality is unchangeable, thus any attempt to pervert it produces tragic consequences.

But does Voegelin escape being classified as a Gnostic himself? After all, Voegelin has identified disorder in modernity and sought to restore balance and order through his own experience and common sense. How did he not impose his own ideology? The answer lies in the word "common" of common sense. Voegelin ordered reality to the common experience of man. He recognized the constant structure of human existence (e.g. search for the ground). Voegelin argues that these expressions of reality, even his own, can be objectively tested, not based on some analytic equation, but rather

⁶³ Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, 21-25.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

“by placing the propositions in the historical field of experiences and their symbolizations.”⁶⁶ In short, Voegelin argues that the test of validity is the lack of originality. Do these symbols reflect the constant movements and structure of the human soul that are constant throughout history? Or do these symbols somehow distort the constants? He does not embark on a battle of ideas but a search for the experience of the soul.

Implications for the Relationship between Greek Philosophy and Christianity

As a conclusion, let me tie this chapter’s discussion of Voegelin’s theory of history back to the larger question of this thesis: “why would a thinker who acknowledges the epochal significance of Christian revelation give primacy to the Greeks in his search for clarity about human consciousness and political order?” In the last chapter, a conclusion was reached that Voegelin had recovered the transcendence, at least in regards to a theory of consciousness, without much mention of Christianity at all. Though it appeared that Christianity played little role in the development of his recovery, a definite conclusion would have been premature. Perhaps, now that an overview of his overall political philosophy has been given, a more conclusive answer can be offered to the question.

Again, the actual primacy of Greek philosophy in Voegelin’s thought must first be established. Building off of the insights provided by Karl Löwith, Voegelin uses the helpful distinction between “meaning *in* history” and “meaning *of* history.”⁶⁷ By emphasizing the movement of history towards a *telos*, Christianity (at least its Pauline

⁶⁶ Voegelin, “Experience and Symbolization in History,” 121-22.

⁶⁷ Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

expression)⁶⁸ was much more interested in providing a meaning *of* history, than the Greeks. The Greeks, emphasizing the constant structure of the human condition, was much more interested in the meaning *in* history. Thus, the question could be put this way: does Voegelin seek to offer the meaning *of* history (Christianity) or meaning *in* history (Greeks)? Or to put it another way: does Voegelin emphasize the *structure* in the movement or the *movement* in the structure? It could be that Voegelin's philosophy of history relies on a Christian, or pneumatic, differentiation. Perhaps his theory of consciousness was thoroughly Greek and his theory of history was heavily Christian. Voegelin did write that "History is Christ writ large."⁶⁹ To argue that Voegelin ignored any movement in history would be a fundamental misreading. Voegelin certainly denies a static history: "History is not a stream of human beings and their actions in time, but the process of man's participation in a flux of divine presence that has *eschatological direction* [italics added]."⁷⁰ Yet a Greek philosophy of history does not appear out of the question either. The entire last chapter was devoted to Voegelin's theory of consciousness, which emphasizes the structure in the movement. Thus, the question is not whether Voegelin recognized movement in history but rather whether or not he emphasized it over and against the structure itself.

In short, Voegelin offers the meaning *in* history because he sought to provide man with a recovery of the *structure* in the movement. Two of the clearest pieces of evidence for this are his attempt to identify the constants of human experiences and his notion of

⁶⁸ Voegelin writes, "The classic meaning *in* history can be opposed by Paul with a meaning *of* history, because he knows the end of the story in the transfiguration that begins with the Resurrection." See *Order and History, vol. 4: The Ecumenic Age*, 324.

⁶⁹ Voegelin, "Immortality: Experience and Symbol," 201.

⁷⁰ Voegelin, *Order and History, vol. 4: The Ecumenic Age*, 50.

equivalence. He sought to reclaim *the* human condition that had been distorted through psychopathologies. Against those who attempted to divide history between before and after which culminated in their philosophy, Voegelin emphasized the equivalence between the human experiences being symbolized. He viewed maintaining the structure of reality as pivotal for political order. My first chapter discussing the order of being, or his theory of consciousness, ends up being the more important contribution to the recovery of transcendence. This importance is because emphasizing the structure (while acknowledging the emergence of truth) can provide man with the best hope of balance. Thus, Voegelin does not emphasize the movement of history, but rather the structure in the movement that was lost through a Gnostic rejection of it. He writes, “[H]istory has no eidos, because the course of history extends into the unknown future. The meaning of history, thus, is an illusion; and this illusionary eidos is created by treating a symbol of faith as if it were a proposition concerning an object of immanent experience.”⁷¹

This discussion of Voegelin’s philosophy of history has provided another glimpse into why Voegelin gave primacy to the Greeks, at least in his philosophy of history. He believed that they provided man with an ability to maintain the balance between the constant (human condition) and the movement towards transcendence (mentioned as the second partial answer in the introduction). Greek philosophy in this sense is superior to pneumatic differentiation. Plato surrounded the “noetic core with his belt of uncertainty” to guard against an obsession of the *eschaton*. This tendency toward imbalance in pneumatic differentiation will become clearer in the next chapter during the discussion of Paul’s analysis of his vision of the resurrected Christ.

⁷¹ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 120.

CHAPTER FOUR

Voegelin on Christianity

The believers are at rest in an uninquiring state of faith; their intellectual metabolism must be stirred by the reminder that man is supposed to be a questioner, that a believer who is unable to explain how his faith is an answer to the enigma of existence may be a 'good Christian' but is a questionable man.

—Eric Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture"

Thus far in Voegelin's therapy of order, Christianity has not surfaced as a way toward restoration. Voegelin recovered transcendence and the order of being by relying heavily on the classical model of the soul articulated by the Greeks. His philosophy of history is distinctively Greek—that is, it emphasizes the meaning *in* history rather than the meaning *of* history. In this chapter I will ask, for Voegelin, what relationship Christianity has to the modern problem, in particular the immanentization of the *eschaton* in some 20th century political mass movements, and its solution. To state it somewhat differently, what is Christianity's relationship to Greek philosophy (solution) and to modernity (problem)? This question can be answered by examining two essays "The Gospel and Culture" and "The Pauline Vision of the Resurrected."

Christianity's Relationship to Greek Philosophy: "The Gospel and Culture"

The first essay, "The Gospel and Culture," is a unique piece of contemporary political philosophy. Part of its unique quality is the occasion on which the address was given. The invitation came from a Christian audience that wanted to "hear what a philosopher has to say about the Word's difficulty to make itself heard in our time and, if

heard at all, to make itself intelligible to those who are willing to listen.”¹ Though such a request might appear somewhat strange, Voegelin did not take the challenge lightly: “I have accepted it [the invitation]—for what use is philosophy if it has nothing to say about the great questions which the men of the time may ask of it?”² Another unique element is the subject matter in question, namely the Christian gospel. Not often do the great philosophers of our day take religion, let alone Christianity, seriously enough to provide substantive comment on it. But Voegelin quotes Christian authorities, including biblical texts and church fathers, throughout the essay and does not attempt to deconstruct them or demonstrate their foolishness. Yet a Christian apologist he is not: “the formulations [of Christianity that I write] might give rise to misunderstandings such as, for example, that I am trying to defend Christianity and that I condemn all that is not Christian. Essentially my concern with Christianity has no religious grounds.”³

In discussing the waning influence of Christianity, Voegelin attempts to identify the root of the problem by comparing early Christianity, particularly its relationship with philosophy, to contemporary Christianity.⁴ In the early stages of Christianity, the gospel was viewed as the answer to the question of human existence. Voegelin illustrates this relationship between the question of existence and the gospel by mentioning the spiritual pilgrimage of Justin Martyr. According to this church father, a

¹ Eric Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture,” in *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934-1964*, edited by Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 139.

² Ibid.

³ Voegelin, “On Christianity (Letter to Alfred Schütz, 1 January, 1953), in *The Philosophy of Order: Essays on History, Consciousness, and Politics*, edited by Peter J. Opitz and Gregor Sebba (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 449.

⁴ Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture,” 140-45.

happy harmony exists between philosophy and theology. Commenting on his thought, Voegelin writes, “Christianity is not an alternative to philosophy, it is philosophy itself in its state of perfection; the history of the Logos comes to its fulfillment through the incarnation of the Word in Christ.”⁵ Justin Martyr spent many years investigating the various philosophies of his age, searching for an answer to the question of human existence, namely the issues of man’s origin and end. This search led him to Christianity.

Yet today, Voegelin believes, Christians are in an uninquiring state. Christians have replaced the searching, uneasiness of faith with the possession of doctrine. For Voegelin, they have forgotten the pilgrimage of faith, the movement of the soul, that travels from question to answer. Through this dogmatization of their faith, they have lost the question but oddly enough have embraced the answer. He illustrates this point by analyzing a modern Dutch Catechism (1966): “This book . . . begins by asking what is the meaning of the fact that we exist. This does not mean taking up a non-Christian attitude. It simply means that we, too, as Christians are men with enquiring minds.” While applauding these Christians for identifying the necessity of the question, Voegelin highlights their context, namely an uninquiring state. He writes, “[T]his defensive clause [‘to take up a non-Christian attitude’] reveals an environment where it is not customary to ask questions.”⁶ Contemporary Christianity finds itself at the point where the question and answer have been separated, not only by those outside the faith, but also by those within it. Voegelin exposes the uninquiring state of Christianity by discussing the form of the answer—that is, faith as a state of completion—I *have* faith. For Voegelin, this

⁵ Ibid., 140.

⁶ Ibid., 141.

possession is attained by assenting to a set of doctrines, rather than an existential state of tension, a faith that seeks understanding.⁷ In *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, Voegelin identifies the essence of Christian faith as “uncertain truth.”⁸ He writes, “This thread of faith, on which hangs all certainty regarding divine, transcendent being, is indeed very thin. Man is given nothing tangible. The substance and proof of the unseen are ascertained through nothing but faith, which man must obtain by the strength of his soul.”⁹ Even upon finding “the answer,” the human condition, the state of tension between the pull and counter-pull, is not obliterated. Man is still in search. There is never a place of arrival, of perfection, at least in this life: “Behind the question to which the saving tale is the answer there looms the darker question why it remains the question of existence even when the answer is found.”¹⁰ For Voegelin, a Christianity that views faith as the answer undermines the human condition by encouraging existential rest in their religion, rather than fostering a life of searching marked by uncertainty.

It follows from the foregoing that, for Voegelin, any attempt to recover the relevance of the gospel (answer) in this current age, the stated purpose of his address, must be in part an attempt to recover the question. Voegelin writes, “It will be necessary . . . to recover the question to which, in Hellenistic-Roman culture, the philosopher could understand the gospel as the answer.”¹¹ The question of human existence has been lost, not because man no longer asks the question, but because the question has been severely

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism* (Wilmington, De: ISI Books, 2004), 83.

⁹ Ibid., 82.

¹⁰ Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture,” 151.

¹¹ Ibid., 142.

distorted. As discussed in my second chapter, the essence of this distortion is what I have dubbed the “loss of transcendence.” In our culture, man struggles to view himself under the divine. He is rather pressured to “empower himself” and become an autonomous will, cutting himself off from the fantastical belief in divine reality. Before there is any hope of the Word being intelligible, the order of being (human existence) must be regained.

Yet a word of caution arises: Voegelin is not arguing that Greek philosophy provides *the* question and Christianity provides *the* answer. His essay in fact deliberately frustrates such a conclusion. Rather, Voegelin argues that the question and the answer are part of the constant structure of human experience, though it certainly is expressed in different fashions.¹² In other words, various communities throughout history, including the Greeks and the Christians, have articulated this experience in symbols that are to be understood as equivalents (properly defined).¹³ Thus, Voegelin would not view Christianity as the only answer. It certainly is an answer, and perhaps the most differentiated answer, but this would not discredit other expressions as false.

It is at this point that Voegelin attempts to remedy another deformation within contemporary Christianity, namely the understanding of a *dichotomy* between faith and reason. He writes:

The double status of the symbols which express the movement in the *metaxy* has been badly obscured in Western history by Christian theologians who have split the two components of symbolic truth, monopolizing, under the title of “revelation,” for Christian symbols the divine component, while assigning, under the title of “natural reason,” to philosophical symbols the human component.¹⁴

¹² Ibid., 145-54.

¹³ See my chapter “The Recovery of Transcendence: A Theory of History,” 19-20.

¹⁴ Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture,” 153.

This dichotomy cuts to the heart of this essay. Voegelin goes to great lengths, not only in this essay but throughout his work, to demonstrate that these divine-human events encompass human civilizations throughout history. To limit the divine encounter to the faith tradition of Christianity, or even the Judeo-Christian tradition, is simply to distort the empirical data, according to Voegelin. In this essay, Voegelin demonstrates that a common “noetic core” exists between Greek philosophy and Christianity and that these two traditions are established by symbolic expressions of a divine-human origin. For Voegelin, Christianity is not philosophy perfected because it is a divine knowledge, while philosophy is human knowledge. Rather, they both are simultaneously human knowledge and divine knowledge.

Voegelin guards against constructing major discontinuities between Christianity and Greek philosophy, maintaining their similarity.¹⁵ This continuity is established by his theory of equivalence. It is in part his theory of consciousness and participation that makes this equivalence necessary. All men, at all times, participate in the same reality, and they participate in only one manner, namely through his consciousness. And this participation reveals that man is in a condition, which Voegelin describes as the “In-between.” Thus, Voegelin argues that there is simply no other way to couch the human condition (the problem and the answer). In other words, there really is no other structure to describe it because there is only one human nature.¹⁶ Yet this does not mean that the expressions given by man are equal or of the same value. Rather,

¹⁵ It is interesting to contrast Voegelin with Leo Strauss in this regard. To highlight the contrast, Strauss writes, “There is a fundamental conflict or disagreement between the Bible and Greek philosophy.” Strauss, “The Mutual Influence of Philosophy and Theology,” *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934-1964*, edited by Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 217. See this larger compilation, *Faith and Political Philosophy*, for several other essays and correspondence between Strauss and Voegelin.

¹⁶ Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture,” 154.

these symbols that rank in insight and clarity articulate an equivalent structure, the *metaxy*, that under-girds the symbols. Voegelin is certainly willing to grant the superiority of Christianity in certain regards to the Greeks. Yet this superiority should not be understood in terms of false dichotomies, such as a forced dichotomy between faith and reason, or Greek philosophy and Christianity.¹⁷ Voegelin also highlights the process of an emerging revelation. Christianity did not arise in a vacuum. It was reliant on various strains of previous “revelations,” ranging from the pneumatic insights of the Israelites to the noetic precision of the Greeks.¹⁸ A point affirmed by Jesus himself: “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.” Voegelin writes:

One can discern a strong existential movement, driving toward an understanding of the hidden divinity . . . behind the intracosmic gods [e.g. in the Egyptian myths] . . . yet it took thirteen centuries of history, and the shattering events of successive imperial conquests, to make people receptive for the truth of the gospel. . . . Even then the movement might have proved socially and historically abortive, unless the classic movement . . . had provided the noetic instrument for the resymbolization of reality beyond the restricted area of reality of the movement itself.¹⁹

Whereas many Christians affirm an exclusive gospel (and human dilemma) to the false gospels of the world, Voegelin demonstrates their equivalence and dependence in a larger revelatory process. Responding to the criticism of his work on Christianity, he writes, “[I]t is Thomas Aquinas who considers Christ to be the head of the *corpus mysticum* that embraces, not only Christians, but all mankind from the creation of the world to its end. In practice this means one has to recognize, and make intelligible, the presence of Christ

¹⁷ Ibid., 159.

¹⁸ Ibid., 160.

¹⁹ Ibid.

in a Babylonian hymn, or a Taoist speculation, or a Platonic dialogue, just as much as in the Gospel.”²⁰ Thus, Voegelin believes that man is a part of one emerging reality, one truth, which certainly includes Christianity, but is not limited to it. Yet because Christianity is the fullest differentiation, one would be irresponsible to exclude Christianity when attempting to understand the human condition.

Two questions naturally arise: In what way does Voegelin demonstrate equivalence between Greek philosophy and Christianity? And how does Voegelin consider Christianity to be the fullest differentiation? Before addressing Christianity’s distinctiveness, I will first turn to consider the equivalence between Christianity and Greek philosophy. He identifies this equivalence through a common question and answer, the “double meaning of life and death.”²¹ The fifth-century Greek philosopher Euripides expresses this as follows: “Who knows if to live is to be dead, and to be dead to live.” This pithy phrase, according to Voegelin, expresses the common experience of human existence. In order to find life (happiness, peace, everlasting life), one must lose his life, or die—that is, die to a life of earthly pleasures and vice. On the other hand, the man who pursues life, defined as earthly pleasures, will indeed lose it—that is, death (nothingness, everlasting death). This double meaning of life and death has been expressed by philosophers, poets, and theologians, throughout human history. In the *Gorgias* (493a), Plato himself picks up on Euripides’ saying, using it to express the

²⁰ Voegelin, “Response to Professor Altizer’s ‘A New History and a New but Ancient God?,’” in *Published Essays 1966-1985*, vol. 12, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1990), 294.

²¹ Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture,” 145.

superiority of the well-ordered life.²² Jesus uses this double meaning of life and death to express the gospel: “For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. What, then will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world but has to suffer the destruction of his life?”

Wrapped up in this metaphor are both the question of human existence and its answer. In this double meaning, Voegelin finds the constant structure of the pull and the counter-pull.²³ The divine pull towards life, understood in terms of this double meaning, is countered with a pull towards death. In Voegelin’s diagram (found in my second chapter), this corresponds to the pull of the transcendent pole—the Divine *Nous*—and the counter-pull toward nothingness, or *apeiron*. In demonstrating its Greek expression, Voegelin quotes a passage from Plato’s *Phaedrus* (238a): “When opinion leads through reason (*logos*) toward the best (*ariston*) and is more powerful, its power is called self-restraint (*sophrosyne*), but when desire (*epithymia*) drags us (*helkein*) toward pleasures and rules within us, its rule is called excess (*hubris*).”²⁴ Here, Plato identifies reason pulling toward *ariston*, the best, and a counter-pull of desire leading to *hubris*. The Myth of the Puppet Player, which has already been alluded to in another chapter, serves as another illustration of this divine pull (the golden chord of reason) and the counter-pull of the lesser metals.

Voegelin is quite clear that Christianity incorporated this Greek noetic core into its symbolization: “If the community of the gospel had not entered the culture of the time

²² Plato, *Gorgias*, in *The Dialogues of Plato, vol. 1: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Gorgias, Menexenus*, translated by R. E. Allen (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984), 280.

²³ Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture,” 155-58.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

by entering its life of reason, it would have remained an obscure sect and probably disappeared from history.”²⁵ In his epistle to the church at Rome, St. Paul documents his own existential struggle of a pull and counter-pull: “For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.” This verse demonstrates the tension between equivalence and superiority. Voegelin uses this verse to demonstrate the equivalency between the Christian and Greek life in the *metaxy*. Yet, many thinkers use this verse to demonstrate, not a commonality among the two thoughts, but rather a distinction, namely a notion of a fallen will. This verse exemplifies the nuance that Voegelin brings, namely an equivalency of experience with more or less differentiated symbols, a point that could be made about all of the experiences he identifies. In other words, Voegelin acknowledges distinctions between philosophy and theology but rejects that this necessitates a dichotomy.

After having established the common question of human existence, an existence characterized as “In-between,” Voegelin turns more specifically to the equivalence between the answers. The “Saving Tale,” as Voegelin describes it, is following the divine pull and suppressing the counter-pull toward nothingness. The answer then is following the pull toward life (the good), which means death (to self), and avoiding the pull toward death (licentiousness), which means life. For Voegelin, following the golden chord of reason, pursuing the best and avoiding desire, or embracing the pull of the Spirit toward of a life of holiness are all equivalent answers. Again, these answers are not equal

²⁵ Ibid., 140.

but rather point to an equivalency beyond the answer itself, namely an equivalent movement in the soul.

Voegelin identifies a provocative aspect of this “Saving Tale,” namely suffering. This suffering is indicated most explicitly in Plato’s Parable of the Cave. In this parable, there are two types of suffering experienced by the man who leaves his fetters behind. The first is the violence of being dragged up and out of the cave by a divine pull. Voegelin writes, “There Plato lets the man who is fettered with his face to the wall be dragged up (*helkein*) by force to the light. The accent lies on the violence suffered by the man in the Cave,” rather than his passivity and even resistance to being turned around.²⁶ Voegelin even alludes to the conversion experience of St. Paul on the road to Damascus as a parallel to this “violence.” In this textual account, Paul was on his way to oversee the execution of Christian witnesses, when he was confronted by the resurrected Christ. This conversion experience left him blind for days, not a conversion of divine pleading by any means. The other type of suffering experienced comes at the hands of those still chained in the cave. In the parable, the enlightened man returns to the cave to free, or enlighten, his fellow man. Instead of welcoming him with joy, they turn on him and murder him. It is at this point that Voegelin draws another parallel between the Greek “Saving Tale” and the Christian gospel, namely the *representative* deaths of Socrates and Jesus. Neither figure was accepted by their own but rather was rejected and murdered at their hands. Thus, their deaths were representative in that they exemplified this “double meaning of life and death.”

²⁶ Ibid., 150-51.

In Voegelin's demonstrating the equivalence between Greek philosophy and Christianity, a dichotomy between these two symbolic expressions would certainly be a forced one. Voegelin's interpretation of Plato's parable further highlights this point. It undermines the very notion that Greek philosophy was purely human ingenuity. As a matter of fact, one might get the impression that Greek philosophy is anything but human, given the emphasis on the divine pull in Plato's parable. Yet the Greeks were clear that the act is not merely divine, or merely human, but rather it is a divine-human act. Voegelin writes, "The terms *seeking* (*zetein*) and *drawing* (*helkein*) do not denote two different movements but symbolize the dynamics in the tension of existence between its human and divine poles."²⁷

The Christian Differentiation

If human communities throughout history, especially in this case Greeks and Christians, have expressed a common question and answer, in what sense, if any, does Voegelin believe Christianity is more fully differentiated? Voegelin is quite clear that Christianity does further differentiate reality. In a fascinating letter written in response to his long-time friend Alfred Schütz, Voegelin discusses some of these achievements in relation to four doctrinal developments: Christology (the incarnation), Theology (the Trinity), Mariology, and theological method.²⁸ In his entire corpus, Voegelin discusses Christology the most, and because the insights that underlie this doctrine have some of

²⁷ Ibid., 150.

²⁸ Voegelin, "On Christianity (Letter to Alfred Schütz, 1 January, 1953)," 453-56.

the clearest political implications, this section will focus on Christology.²⁹ The key to this further differentiation is a “divine irruption” in the person of Jesus, a share in the fullness of divine reality.³⁰ That is to say, Jesus experienced the “In-between” condition of humanity to its fullest (*pleroma*). Voegelin would later call it the “pleromatic *metaxy*.”³¹ He believes that the letter to the Colossians expressed this event precisely: “For in him [Jesus] the whole fullness of divine reality (*theotēs*) dwells bodily.”³² Voegelin argues that this descriptive neologism was created in order to encapsulate the utter uniqueness of Jesus’s experience.³³ In another essay, Voegelin sees the church fathers attempting to preserve this “pleromatic *metaxy*” in the early councils. Discussing the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451), he writes, “This valiant attempt of the *patres* to express the two-in-one reality of God’s participation in man, without either compromising the separateness of the two or splitting the one, concerns the same

²⁹ The choice to limit this discussion to Christology in no way limits the other achievements by Christianity or their political implications. In terms of the Trinity, Voegelin identifies three major contributions: (1) “the radical transcendence of God” [the Father], (2) “the divine transforming intervention reaching into ‘nature’” [the Son], and (3) “the presence of the spirit in the community of the faithful” [the Spirit]. The Marion doctrines express human participation in the work of salvation, including the work of progress in sanctification. The achievement of theological method, exemplified by Dionysius Areopagita and Thomas Aquinas, guards against literalism and dogmatism, allowing man to understand to his fullest the insights into reality of the pneumatic tradition.

³⁰ Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture,” 158.

³¹ Voegelin, “Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme: A Meditation,” in *Published Essays 1966-1985*, vol. 12, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1990), 369-71.

³² It is important to note that Voegelin translates *theotēs* as divine reality, instead of its usual translation—godhead. The implications of this choice will be discussed later. Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture,” 158.

³³ *Ibid.*, 158-59.

structure of intermediate reality, of the *metaxy*, the philosopher encounters when he analyzes man's consciousness."³⁴

Though Voegelin believes that the incarnation provides differentiated insight (as will be discussed shortly), it also illustrates an equivalence. Voegelin argues that Jesus's incarnation is an experience of reality within the human structure that is not of a different kind but rather of a different degree. In other words, the incarnation is *not* an event unlike any other in the sense that it is of a fundamentally different structure. Just as man participates in the divine reality in a metaxic state, so did Jesus. In Christian language, this common structure is highlighted through symbols such as the "son of God" or the "image of God." The biblical witness indicates that all who, to use Voegelin's language, follow the divine pull, including Jesus, are "sons of God" (Matthew 5:9; Romans 8:14-19; Galatians 3:26). To be man is also to be in the "image of God" (Genesis 1:27). The author of Hebrews also points to this equivalence: "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted." The two symbols of son and image express this common human experience between all human beings, including Jesus. However, Jesus's experience *is* unlike any other in the sense that he participates in the divine to man's fullest capacity. Michael Morrissey reads Voegelin in this way as well: "He [Voegelin] would certainly accept the view of Christ as the fullest actualization of humanity, the one person who

³⁴ Voegelin, "Immortality: Experience and Symbol," in *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934-1964*, edited by Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 202.

fully responded to the intrinsic grace of the Holy Spirit given to all. . . . [I]t is apparent that Voegelin's view is based on the notion of Jesus's union with God as unique in degree but not in kind."³⁵ Even though those who follow the divine pull are considered "sons of God," there is a uniqueness of Jesus described in the biblical language. The writings distinguish between *the* Son of God and sons of God mainly by identifying Jesus as the singular, or exclusive, son of God—"the only begotten of the Father" (Matthew 27; Acts 9:20; Galatians 2:20; 1 John 5:5-20). The symbol, "image of God," is also used to demonstrate Jesus's uniqueness by Paul: "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, *who is the image of God* [italics added]." Again, the exclusiveness of this position is expressed: "He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation." Yet if one were to deny the commonality, the equivalence, one would lose the ability to even make sense of the exclusive symbols being used to describe Jesus.³⁶

In what way(s), does Jesus's pleromatic experience further differentiate reality? The symbolic expression of the person of Jesus is a further differentiation from the Greeks because the Greek expression was still cosmological and not anthropological. This differentiation finds two expressions: (1) Jesus as the image of the Unknown God

³⁵ Michael Morrissey, *Consciousness and Transcendence: The Theology of Eric Voegelin* (Notre Dame, In.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 243.

³⁶ There is no question that Voegelin's discussion of the incarnation is controversial. The strongest criticism accuses Voegelin of fundamentally misunderstanding the doctrine and even affirming aberrations rejected by the early church. For example, Morrissey accuses Voegelin of constructing the Christ of the adoptionists, who held that the man Jesus was "adopted" by God and made divine. He writes, "Voegelin rejects the orthodox interpretation of Christ as the eternally preexistent Son of God incarnated only in Jesus." Morrissey, *Consciousness and Transcendence: The Theology of Eric Voegelin*, 242. See also James Rhodes, "Christian Faith, Jesus the Christ, and History," *The Political Science Reviewer* 27 (1998): 44-67.

and (2) Jesus as the mediator between the Unknown God and man. In terms of the image question, Voegelin writes:

The cosmos is the image (*eikōn*) of the Eternal; it is the visible god (*theos aisthēos*) in the image of the Intelligible . . . it is the one and only begotten (*monogenēs*) heaven whose divine father is so recondite that it would be impossible to declare him to all men (*Timaeus* 28-29, 92c). In the contraposition of the *monogenēs theos* in Plato's *Timaeus* and John 1:18 the barrier becomes visible which the movement of classic philosophy cannot break through to reach the insights peculiar to the gospel.³⁷

Plato believed the cosmos to be the “image” and the “only begotten;” the incarnation revealed that man is the image, while Jesus experienced it in its fullness as the “only begotten of the Father.” (Certainly, Plato believed that man served as a microcosm of the cosmos, but this is different from man serving as an image, or microcosm if you will, of the Unknown God.)

In *The New Science of Politics*, Voegelin writes, “The impossibility of *philia* between God and man may be considered typical for the whole range of anthropological truth [of which Greek philosophy is a part]. . . . The experience of mutuality in the relation with God, of the *amicitia* [friendship] in the Thomistic sense, of the grace which imposes a supernatural form on the nature of man, is the specific difference of Christian truth.”³⁸ Plato maintained that the intracosmic gods were mediators between man and the Unknown God, whereas in Christianity, those gods are removed.³⁹ The revelatory event symbolized by Christians as “the incarnation” no longer allows man to view his

³⁷ Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture,” 159.

³⁸ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 78. See also *History of Political Ideas*, vol. 4: *Renaissance and Reformation*, vol. 22, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by David L. Morse and William M. Thompson (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 249-50.

³⁹ Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture,” 173.

relationship with the Unknown God as being mediated by the gods of Greek myths, nor by the high priest of the particular community of Israel, nor by the cosmos (the image [*eikōn*] of the Unknown). Rather, man can commune with the Unknown God without geographical, political, or ethnic barriers. Yet it should be noted that this *amicitia* is mediated universally through Christ.⁴⁰ From Christianity onwards, man can view himself as universal man in friendship with God. According to Voegelin, this friendship between the Unknown God and man was impossible in Greek anthropology, rooted in the concept of friendship. In discussing Aristotle's view on this matter, Voegelin writes, "Only in so far as men are equal through the love of their noetic self is friendship possible; the social bond between unequals will be weak. On this occasion, Aristotle formulated his thesis that friendship was impossible between God and man because of their radical inequality."⁴¹ The Christ event provided man with increased insight into reality. The gospel then is life in the *metaxy*, the in-between, in its most differentiated sense.

Political Implications

Given Voegelin's belief that knowledge of the order of being orders in some fashion political reality, one should expect that any differentiation into that order would have significant political implications. Just as the clarification brought by Greek philosophy moved politics from a microcosm (politics ordered to cosmos) to a macroanthropos (politics ordered to soul of man), so too, the differentiation brought about by Christianity ought to have some political import. However, previous chapters have suggested that Voegelin's political philosophy seems more Greek than Christian.

⁴⁰ Voegelin, "On Christianity (Letter to Alfred Schütz, 1 January, 1953)," 454.

⁴¹ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 77.

What does Voegelin's essay "The Gospel and Culture" suggest on this score? On the one hand, the purpose of the essay (that is to discuss Christianity's waning relevance in this age) would not necessarily be an appropriate format for such discussion. And so we do not find the question taken up. But of course, this lack of discussion of such import does not demonstrate anything conclusive. Is there any evidence outside this essay? Indeed, there is.

In 1942, Voegelin published a rather lengthy review of Huntington Cairns's book, *The Theory of Legal Science*.⁴² Oddly enough, this essay would appear an even less likely place to give any indication of Christianity's political import, but nevertheless it is there. He writes, "The appearance of Christ has added to the idea of man the dimension of spiritual singularity of every human being, so that *we can no longer build a science of social order, for instance on the anthropologies of Plato or Aristotle* [italics added]."⁴³ In a response to a provocative letter by Leo Strauss commenting on this review essay, Voegelin reaffirms his commitment to the political implications of this Christian insight. He writes, "The Platonic-Aristotelian man is the man of the polis and is, even for Aristotle, tied to the *omphalos* [belly-button] of Delphi; precisely from the Hellenic position, a universal political science is radically impossible. Christianity and historical consciousness seem rather to be steps in the direction of the universalization of the image of man. . . . In my opinion that is the decisive reason for the superiority of the Christian

⁴² This author is grateful to Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper for their compilation of the Strauss-Voegelin correspondence, because otherwise this review essay would likely not have been examined by the author. Voegelin, "The Theory of Legal Science: A Review," *Louisiana Law Review* 4 (1942): 554-71.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 562-63.

anthropology over the Hellenic.”⁴⁴ Thus, Voegelin does argue that Christianity has some political import, a fact that takes this thesis in a rather unexpected turn, given the last two chapters.

What political implications would this Christian differentiation have?

Concrete political implications for various philosophies are not always as clearly spelled out in Voegelin’s work as one might desire. The political significance of Christianity is no different. As a matter of fact, it appears to be the least fleshed out of any of the differentiations that occur; it is quite odd that the most significant, in the sense of the fullest differentiated reality, receives the least discussion. I will attempt to suggest a couple of political implications, both of which get little discussion from Voegelin himself. The first is the ability to provide critique to political structures and ideologies. It appears that Voegelin hints at such an implication in the fourth volume of *History of Political Ideas*, written in the forties very early in Voegelin’s career.⁴⁵ He writes:

[T]he tension between the institutions of the polis and the sentiments of the apolitical groups would recur in a Christian civilization in a more radical form because the Christian idea of the person in immediacy to God would prove the permanent irritant against the institutions. The idea of the Christian person would function doubly as an agent of revolt against the institutionalization of the

⁴⁴ Voegelin, “Letter to Leo Strauss (9 December, 1942), in *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934-1964*, edited by Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 9.

⁴⁵ The author thanks Ellis Sandoz for bringing this text to his attention. However, it could be argued that, because this discussion of Christianity’s political import occurred early in Voegelin’s career, perhaps it is not conclusive. After all, Voegelin argued most explicitly for Christianity’s political import in his *History of Political Ideas*. And as was discussed in my third chapter, Voegelin abandoned this entire project. But he acknowledged later that his exegesis of that history stands. Further, his argument for the superiority of the Christian anthropology was asserted in many later works, even the work that he was mulling over on his death bed. See Voegelin, “The Beginning and the Beyond: A Meditation on Truth,” in *What Is History? And Other Late Unpublished Writings*, vol. 28, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Thomas Hollweck and Paul Caringella (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1990); *Order and History*, vol. 5: *In Search of Order*, vol. 18, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 113.

relations between the soul and God and as an agent of regeneration of the institutions.⁴⁶

He indicates that the immediacy of man's relationship with God threatens the stability of institutions, particularly their civil theology. To some extent, this dissatisfaction was evident in the Greek philosophers' discontent with the less differentiated, compact myths of the polis. Yet in Christianity, the universal man is given heightened justification for such call to reform.⁴⁷ This justification is in part a result of man no longer needing mediation to the divine through a political or ethnic group. Through the universal mediation of Christ, it was revealed that man has less-restricted access to the Unknown God than previously thought. Further, man's salvation is not tied to any community, thus politics is de-divinized (a point to be discussed later).

The second political implication is universal human dignity and rights. This achievement is mentioned in one of the few, if not the only, discussions of Voegelin and Christianity's political significance; Glenn Hughes writes that, in Voegelin's philosophy, "it is only the Christian vision of *imago Dei* that establishes the *absolute spiritual equality*, and thus the *equal spiritual dignity*, of all human beings—a recognition that underlies all later political affirmations of universal human dignity and universal human

⁴⁶ Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas, vol. 4: Renaissance and Reformation*, 132-33.

⁴⁷ Though this sounds similar to a defense for a Protestant, or modern, man, this is far from the case. As is well known, Voegelin was no fan of the Reformation. He critiqued the movement for distorting the Christian symbols through dogmatization and being too focused on the *eschaton*. In *The New Science of Politics*, Voegelin claims that John Calvin is in a "pneumopathological state," breaking with the past Western tradition, writing his *Institutes* that were to be a sure guide for faith, what Voegelin called, "the first deliberately created Gnostic koran." But it certainly should be viewed as a step beyond the man of the Greek polis. Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 139. See also Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas, vol. 4: Renaissance and Reformation*. For a critique of Voegelin's reading of Protestantism see William Stevenson, "An Agnostic View of Voegelin's Gnostic Calvin," *Review of Politics* 66 (2004): 415-43 and Bruce Douglass, "A Diminished Gospel: A Critique of Voegelin's Interpretation of Christianity," in *Eric Voegelin's Search for Order in History*, edited by Stephen McKnight (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 149-53.

rights.”⁴⁸ His statement is as an enticing a place to start. It does not appear immediately obvious that Christianity is the *only* vision that can ground human dignity and rights. On an Aristotelian *philia politike* (political friendship), Voegelin argues elsewhere for human rights and dignity: “[S]ince every man participates in love of the transcendent Being and is aware of such a ground . . . out of which he exists, every man can, by virtue of this noetic self, have love for other men.”⁴⁹ He calls this justification for human dignity and rights (found in both Greek philosophy and Christianity) the “theomorphic” nature of man—that is, man as in the form and image of God.⁵⁰ But the universal aspect of human dignity and rights is made possible only through Christianity. In Voegelin’s own political philosophy, what justifies this claim? Greek anthropology limits the universal human right, because of the cosmic limitations on divine reality. If Plato constructs his theological vision with the intracosmic gods of the Greeks, then it would be impossible to develop a universal man, because the mediating divinities in Plato’s myth are bound to Hellas. Thus, only a localized dignity could be constructed. Yet in the Christian myth, man has universal access to the Unknown God, not limited by the mediation of geographical divinities.

In sum, the Christian differentiation of reality provides political import.

Christology symbolizes the insight into reality that there is a transformative *amiticia*

⁴⁸ Glenn Hughes, “Eric Voegelin and Christianity,” *The Intercollegiate Review* 40 (2004): 31. For textual justification, see Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, vol. 31, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Detlev Clemens and Brendan Purcell (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 205; *History of Political Ideas*, vol. 2: *The Middle Ages to Aquinas*, vol. 20, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Peter von Sivers (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 192.

⁴⁹ Voegelin, “In Search of the Ground,” in *Published Essays 1953-65*, vol. 11, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 231.

⁵⁰ Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, vol. 31, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Detlev Clemens and Brendan Purcell (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 87.

between the Unknown God and man, demonstrated most poignantly in Christ himself. This divine friendship, that is accessible through the universal mediation of Christ, provides the groundwork for at least two significant political implications: the ability to critique political structures and ideologies and the justification for universal human dignity and rights. This demonstrates that Christianity is, as Voegelin wrote to Strauss, politically superior (properly understood).

Christianity's Relationship to Modernity: "The Pauline Vision of the Resurrected"

Even though Voegelin believed Christianity was indeed superior, he was strikingly critical of Christianity itself. As already discussed in my third chapter, Voegelin believes that the pneumatic mode of experience is necessarily predisposed to, what he calls in this essay, an imbalance "through its apocalyptic ferocity."⁵¹ In other words, the Christian experience is necessarily drawn toward a preoccupation with the *eschaton*. He argues that this experience of the movement toward the Beyond, toward transfiguration, must be kept in balance with the constant human condition and that disorder arises when man becomes dissatisfied with this tension and seeks to "immanentize the *eschaton*." Already in "The Gospel and Culture," Voegelin identifies an annoyance on the part of Paul concerning humanity: "Paul is quite an impatient man. He wants the divine reality of the primary experience of the cosmos right away differentiated as the world-transcendent divinity that has become incarnate in Christ; he considers it inexcusable that mankind should have passed through a phase in history when the immortal God was represented by images."⁵² Paul cannot fathom that man

⁵¹ Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture," 154-55.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 159.

prior to him did not understand the divine reality. For Voegelin, this demonstrates Paul's impatience toward the revelatory process itself. Though this particular impatience is not rooted in a fixation on things eschatological, it does give further credence to Voegelin's theory that Paul is impatient and that it effects his interpretation of reality. In order to understand the political dangers of Paul's eschatological impatience, particularly in relationship to modern political pathologies, we must turn to another controversial essay, "The Pauline Vision of the Resurrected."⁵³

There can be no question that this essay has almost single-handedly distanced many, if not most, of Voegelin's Christian followers from him. This essay received more criticism than "The Gospel and Culture," in part it seems because it was part of the much anticipated fourth volume of *Order and History*, whereas "The Gospel and Culture" was published in an edited collection of various authors on Christianity.⁵⁴ The Christian concern was that Voegelin not only devoted much less space to Christianity than he promised, but also provided anything but glowing praise in the pages he did dedicate to the faith, particularly in *The Ecumenic Age*. Gerhart Niemeyer was "deeply disappointed" in Voegelin's discussion of Paul, calling it an "entire speculation."⁵⁵ He writes, "Voegelin's exegesis of Paul would not have to be changed if one removed Jesus Christ from it altogether. . . . It seems that this once Voegelin has approached a great

⁵³ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4: *The Ecumenic Age*, vol. 17, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Michael Franz (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 303-339.

⁵⁴ Donald Miller and Dikran Hadidian, eds. *Jesus and Man's Hope* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1971).

⁵⁵ Gerhart Niemeyer, "Eric Voegelin's Philosophy of the Drama of Mankind," *Modern Age* 20 (1976): 34-35.

spiritual reality from a standpoint extraneous to it.”⁵⁶ Bruce Douglass called Voegelin’s reading of Christian eschatology tantamount to “radical surgery.”⁵⁷ One of the strongest, yet unfounded, responses to Voegelin’s *Ecumenic Age* came from Frederick Wilhelmsen: “The very question, hence, of the historicity of Christ and of His resurrection, of the Easter we Christians celebrate as the central feast of our Faith, annoys Voegelin. . . . But, Dr. Voegelin, ‘if Christ be not risen’—in the words of the same Paul—then I for one don’t give a damn about Paul’s experience of him.”⁵⁸

What is Voegelin’s major point in “The Pauline Vision of the Resurrected”? In brief, Voegelin accuses Paul of being overly fixated on the movement of history toward its *telos*, or as Voegelin called it, a “metastatic expectation.”⁵⁹ That is to say, Paul had a certain expectation that the *eschaton* will break in time in the not too distant future. Unlike the Platonic expression, Paul does not maintain the balance necessary to guard against this expectation. Instead of clouding the future transfiguration in mystery, Paul articulates his vision in explicit fashion and expects the event to occur with certainty in his lifetime. In comparing these noetic and pneumatic expressions, Voegelin focuses in on the treatment of *phthora* (perishing).⁶⁰ According to Voegelin, the noetic interpretation maintains the balance between *genesis* (birth) and *phthora* (perishing) by leaving the future immortality of man in mystery. Yet due to his metastatic expectation,

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵⁷ Bruce Douglass, “A Diminished Gospel: A Critique of Voegelin’s Interpretation of Christianity,” 148.

⁵⁸ Frederick Wilhelmsen, *Christianity and Political Philosophy* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1978), 203.

⁵⁹ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4: *The Ecumenic Age*, 304.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 305-06.

Paul allows the balance of life and death, *genesis* and *phthora*, to be distorted by arguing that man will be transfigured without death: “we shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we (*who have not yet died*) shall be changed [*italics added*].”⁶¹ In other words, going beyond the constant tension between the pull of life and the counter-pull of death, Paul believes that the structure of human existence will be transformed in time and that it will occur in the near future. Voegelin compares Paul’s certain expectation with the mystery of history’s end. He writes, “For the directional movement in reality has the character of a mystery indeed: Although we can experience the direction as real, we do not know why reality is in such a state that it has to move beyond itself or why the movement has not been consummated by an event of transfiguration in the past; neither can we predict the date for such an event in the future or know what form it will assume.”⁶²

For Voegelin, the core of Paul’s zealous anticipation is his direct correlation between the vision of the resurrected Christ and the resurrection of the dead. Paul interpreted his vision of the resurrected Christ as indication that the transfiguration of the Beyond had begun: “The vision of the Resurrected is, for Paul, more than a theophanic event in the Metaxy; it is the beginning of transfiguration itself.”⁶³ Voegelin offers Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians as evidence. Paul writes, “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then your faith

⁶¹ Ibid., 306.

⁶² Ibid., 303.

⁶³ Ibid., 313.

is in vain [*mataia*]. . . . If we have no more than hope in Christ in this life, then we are of all men the most pitiful.” It is in this last phrase—“we are of all men the most pitiful”—that Voegelin believes is the clearest example of Paul’s imbalance. He writes, “[for Paul] hope in this life, in our existence in the Metaxy, not only is not enough, it is worse than nothing, unless this hope is embedded in the assurance that derives from the vision.”⁶⁴

It is at this point that a great danger inherent in Christianity comes into Voegelin’s view, namely, the spiritual stamina necessary to maintain the “balance of consciousness.” As a pneumatic mode of theophany, Christianity is already predisposed to certain tendencies that would lead toward imbalance. Voegelin argues that pneumatic experiences tend to focus on the *movement* in the structure, rather than the *structure* in the movement. That is to say, Christianity is already predisposed to a focus on the eschatological direction of history. This is in contrast to the noetic mode, which focuses on the constant human condition, the in-between.

Christianity, as a pneumatic experience, is also given to imbalance because of the level of intensity of the divine-human encounter. Though both the noetic and pneumatic experiences are indeed theophanies, Voegelin argues that the pneumatic experience is heightened. From Moses and the burning bush to Paul’s vision of the resurrected Christ, this intense experience of the divine Beyond would tend toward an imbalance. That is to say, this type of experience, particularly if it contains a vision of transfiguration as in Paul’s case, would naturally cause one to focus on the Beyond to the detriment of the now.

Thus, such an experience requires a conscious effort to guard against an imbalance, a “metastatic expectation.” According to Voegelin, Christianity’s

⁶⁴ Ibid., 312-13.

“missionary fervor” and its broad appeal to the “inarticulate humanity of the common man” only compounds this problem.⁶⁵ In *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, he writes, “The substance and proof of the unseen are ascertained through nothing but faith. . . . Not all men are capable of such spiritual stamina; most need institutional help, and even this is not always sufficient.”⁶⁶ A temptation arises among the Christian world; a temptation Voegelin describes as a “temptation to fall from uncertain truth to certain untruth.”⁶⁷ That is to say, there is a temptation to move from faith, known by the experience of participation, to certain knowledge, grounded in dogmatic propositions, removed from the experience of reality. Because of this uncertainty, those without spiritual stamina may become disillusioned with the human condition itself. This disillusionment could result in two manifestations. It could cause a Christian to focus so intently on the Beyond that the now becomes nothing but mundane. This appears to be Voegelin’s understanding of Paul. But worse yet, the Christian could become so disillusioned that the order of being, the human condition itself, becomes the problem. This rebellion against reality is what Voegelin describes as an “egophanic revolt”—that is, the “pathos of thinkers who exist in a state of alienation and libidinous obsession.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture,” 154.

⁶⁶ Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, 82.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁶⁸ A great similarity arises here between Voegelin’s earlier work on Gnosticism and the egophanic revolt, this characterization of the modern problem, particularly the immanentizing of the *eschaton*, with Christian origins. Some have even called these two descriptive terms—Gnosticism and egophanic revolt—synonyms. Though they are quite similar, there is one major difference. The Gnostic origins of modernity are not exclusively connected with Christianity. As a matter of fact, this phenomenon arises prior to the Christian movement. A point Voegelin acknowledges: “Above all, the anti-cosmism of the Gnostic movement is not a deformation of Christianity, for the Gnostic distortion of reality through the contraction of a divine order into the Beyond of consciousness *precedes the Christian pneumatic differentiation* [italics added].”⁶⁸ Yet the egophanic revolt is exclusively linked in Voegelin’s later work to Christianity itself. That is to say, Christianity produced the modern egophanic revolt. For example, Voegelin places Hegel is

Such distortions began not long after the Christ event. For Voegelin, the Christ of the incarnation became the Christ of Christian dogma, even during the earliest church councils.⁶⁹ He writes, “The Unknown God whose *theotes* [divine reality] was present in the existence of Jesus has been eclipsed by the revealed God of Christian doctrine.”⁷⁰ For Voegelin, the Christ event, the pleromatic *metaxy*, became a dogmatic construction, a concept removed from its engendering experience. These distortions also gave rise to what Voegelin calls, the “modern outburst of new Christs” (e.g. Johann Fichte, Georg W. F. Hegel, and Auguste Comte).⁷¹ The distortion of the Christ event, coupled with the Christian apocalyptic expectation, produced a fertile environment for these “new Christs” to emerge. According to Voegelin, these thinkers constructed a new reality, a new history, so that history would culminate in their thought, bringing forth the new age, the eschatological transfiguration man had anticipated, thus making themselves the Christ of the Second Coming, which Christianity has been proclaiming since its inception.

Voegelin believes that Christianity is in some sense responsible for these modern pathologies, but to what degree is still unclear. Is this modern problem “a more complete

in this tradition. He writes, “Certainly, Hegel was not a simple ‘heretic.’ The rejection [of the Definition of Chalcedon] quite possibly is motivated by a sense of incongruity between the Christ of the dogma and the Son of God we meet in the Gospels and the letters of Paul.”⁶⁸ This rejection led Hegel to an ingenious device, according to Voegelin. Since Hegel had rejected the council’s dogmatic formula that was there to preserve the theophanic event, he could reject the Christ event. But by keeping the language of Christianity, he could “use it as a cover for his far-reaching egophanic enterprise.”⁶⁸ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4: *The Ecumenic Age*, 69, 327-30.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 325-26.

⁷⁰ Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture,” 164.

⁷¹ Ibid., 166.

realization of Christianity's own essence," as Murray Jardine interprets Voegelin?⁷² Or is modernity a perversion of it? There is no doubt that Voegelin places significant blame on Christianity. He writes, "[T]he modern revolt is so intimately a development of the 'Christianity' against which it is in revolt."⁷³ Yet he distinguishes Christianity from modernity on several occasions. In *The New Science of Politics*, he writes, "For it must never be forgotten that Western society is not all modern but that modernity is a growth within it, *in opposition to the classic and Christian tradition* [italics added]."⁷⁴ In a later essay, "Configurations of History" (1968), he makes a clear distinction between a Gnostic, apocalyptically driven eschatology and a balanced Christian one:

It [Christian eschatology] depends upon neither the Gnostic eternity here and now, nor upon the apocalyptic future, but rather upon something that will happen in time, but that, when it happens, will be beyond time. It is a very curious mixed form, a compromise between the two extremes. And so long as one adheres to this view closely, he avoids the danger of falling into the extremes, either apocalyptic or Gnostic.⁷⁵

In order to address the degree to which Christianity is culpable for modernity, a further examination of the political implications of Christianity is needed. Christianity has always possessed a certain apolitical nature. Even its political implications are in some respects apolitical. For example, the universality of man, a justification for political critique, reveals that salvation is not gained through politics. This knowledge in turn provides less incentive for political action. According to Voegelin, the earliest

⁷² Murray Jardine, "Eric Voegelin's Interpretation(s) of Modernity: A Reconsideration of the Spiritual and Political Implications of Voegelin's Therapeutic Analysis," *Review of Politics* 57 (1995): 581-605.

⁷³ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4: *The Ecumenic Age*, 336.

⁷⁴ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 176.

⁷⁵ Voegelin, "Configurations of History," in *Published Essays 1966-1985*, vol. 12, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1990), 107-08.

expressions of Christian political thought were not concerned with politics: “If we mean by Christianity, in its origin, that sort of experience that has manifested itself in the writings of the New Testament, Christianity contains nothing about politics, but only, apocalyptically, about our way out of this world through the Second Coming of Christ, which will occur next week or the next week after next—in your lifetime, anyway. There is no particular interest attached to the order of life in community, and so you can’t expect politics out of the Bible.”⁷⁶

Voegelin indicts this apolitical nature of Christianity as having Gnostic tendencies. In one of the more insightful essays discussing Christianity’s role in the modern problem, Jardine writes that modernity is “not a rebellion against Christianity but precisely a more complete realization of Christianity’s own essence—or at least the essence of orthodox Christian theology as it has developed since Paul.”⁷⁷ This seems satisfactory as far as it goes. That is to say, it seems to make sense of Voegelin’s discussion of the Pauline vision. After all, it was Voegelin who wrote, “[T]he increasing obscurity [the Hegelian system] is not caused by an inexplicable deviation from analytical purity but, on the contrary, *is inherent to the constant from its origin* in Paul’s analytically defective interpretation of his vision [*italics added*].”⁷⁸

Yet this conclusion seems somehow unsatisfactory, when viewed in light of the rest of Voegelin’s commentary on Christianity. This dissatisfaction points to a tension in Voegelin’s thought. On the one hand, he gives superiority to the differentiation achieved

⁷⁶ Voegelin, “In Search of the Ground,” 245.

⁷⁷ Jardine, “Eric Voegelin’s Interpretation(s) of Modernity: A Reconsideration of the Spiritual and Political Implications of Voegelin’s Therapeutic Analysis,” 600-01.

⁷⁸ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4: *The Ecumenic Age*, 333-34.

through the Christ event and acknowledges its political significance. He writes that Christianity is “more differentiated through the intensely articulate experience of loving-divine action in the illumination of existence with truth.”⁷⁹ On the other hand, he is very critical of Christianity and places the blame for certain modern political pathologies on it. He calls the epiphany of Christ the “catalyst that made eschatological consciousness a historical force, both in forming and deforming of humanity.”⁸⁰ Without abandoning the question of Christianity’s relationship to modern political pathologies, it would be helpful to investigate this tension in more detail. This investigation will help shed light on the current question.

Reconciling the Tension in Voegelin’s Philosophy

The tension is resolved through a distinction that Voegelin makes between the actual theophanic event and competing interpretations of it. Earlier in his work, Voegelin described this distinction between the “core of truth” and its various misinterpretations as the distinction between “essential Christianity” and “eschatological Christianity.”⁸¹ He is clear that man’s *interpretation* of his experience of reality will not necessarily be correct. Voegelin distinguishes between the “core of truth” in Paul’s vision and Paul’s “metastatic expectation,” or misinterpretation of his vision.⁸² Voegelin writes, “The cause of the discrepancy in Paul’s interpretation can now be more exactly determined as an inclination to abolish the tension between the eschatological *telos* of reality and the mystery of the

⁷⁹ Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture,” 155.

⁸⁰ Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4: *The Ecumenic Age*, 66.

⁸¹ Voegelin, “On Christianity (Letter to Alfred Schütz, 1 January, 1953),” 452.

⁸² Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4: *The Ecumenic Age*, 336-39.

transfiguration that is actually going on within historical reality.”⁸³ Voegelin argues that the valid expression of Paul’s vision is the feeling of the eschatological movement of history, yet it goes awry when it is “used to anticipate the concrete process of transfiguration *within history* [italics added].”⁸⁴ Thus, Voegelin appears to be arguing that the Christ event, as experienced by the historical person of Jesus and by his followers (e.g. Paul), gave insight into the human condition, yet Christianity, that is interpretations of the event (e.g. Paul’s letters), are often mistaken and imbalanced.

To demonstrate this distinction further, I will compare Augustine’s theory of history to Paul’s eschatological expectations. In *The New Science of Politics*, Voegelin describes St. Augustine’s thought as having a de-divinizing effect on the world and politics, which eventually led to their re-divinization, leading to the modern problem:

Christianity had left in its wake the vacuum of a de-divinized natural sphere of political existence. In the concrete situation of the late Roman Empire the early Western political foundations, this vacuum did not become a major source of troubles as long as the myth of the empire was not seriously disturbed by the consolidation of natural realms and as long as the church was the predominately civilizing factor in the evolution of Western society. . . . As soon, however, as a certain point of civilizational saturation was reached, when centers of lay culture formed at the courts and in the cities, . . . it became abundantly clear that the problems of a society in historical existence were not exhausted by waiting for the end of the world. . . . The immanentization of the Christian eschaton made it possible to endow society in its natural existence with a meaning which Christianity denied to it.⁸⁵

Just like Voegelin’s reading of Paul, he critiques Augustine for being apolitical and paving the way for Gnosticism. However, there is an important distinction to be made in regards to Voegelin’s reading of Augustine versus Voegelin’s reading of Paul. There is a

⁸³ Ibid., 337.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 338.

⁸⁵ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 162-63.

major difference, for Voegelin, between Pauline Christianity and its relationship to modernity and an Augustinian Christianity's relationship to modernity. In the Pauline interpretation, there is an imbalanced focus on the eschatological transfiguration. The Augustinian interpretation attempts to correct that imbalance by placing the *eschaton* in the Beyond. As a matter of fact, Voegelin calls this shift a "Pauline compromise," which allowed for Christianity to become effective in political life. Voegelin writes, "Christianity became historically effective through the Pauline compromises, one of which concerned the order of the world—not only the order of the state but the very being of the world, a world which will *not* end next week."⁸⁶ This point harkens back to a quote from Voegelin in "The Gospel and Culture:" "[I]f the community of the gospel had not entered the culture of the time by entering its life of reason, it would have remained an obscure sect and probably disappeared from history."⁸⁷ This noetically-controlling shift is viewed *as a positive advancement* for Voegelin: "This [interpretation] gave rise to the distinction between sacred and profane history. . . . [T]he experience of perfection has been critically reduced to its [genuine] content and the hypostasis of superhuman perfection has been avoided."⁸⁸

Yet the Augustinian theory of history still provided a vacuum for later distortions by allowing the political order to remain mundane: "The immanentization of the Christian eschaton made it possible to endow society in its natural existence with a meaning which Christianity denied to it." It would appear that an Augustinian

⁸⁶ Voegelin, "On Christianity (Letter to Alfred Schütz, 1 January, 1953)," 453.

⁸⁷ Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture," 140.

⁸⁸ Voegelin, "On Gnosticism (Letter to Alfred Schütz, 10 January, 1953)," in *The Philosophy of Order: Essays on History, Consciousness, and Politics*, edited by Peter J. Opitz and Gregor Sebba (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 458-59.

Christianity is less responsible for the ills of modernity, on Voegelin's reading, than Pauline Christianity, particularly due to the eschatological focus. The Augustinian theory, which balanced the eschatological fixation of Paul, simply failed to provide worth to the mundane. However, for Voegelin, Paul's interpretation appears to have necessarily led to the egophanic revolt.

Regarding Christianity's relationship to modernity, Voegelin's positive evaluation of Augustine's theory of history provides a case in point. Christianity does not necessarily have to lead to modernity. As a matter of fact, there appears to be no such thing as "Christianity" for Voegelin. In provocative fashion, Voegelin writes, "I have my doubts as to whether Christianity exists at all."⁸⁹ There are only various interpretations of the pneumatic Christ event. Some appear to be more balanced than others; Voegelin appears to have regarded Augustinian Christianity as a move in the right direction.⁹⁰ This is where, in my view, Voegelin is attempting to provide noetic balance to the pneumatic Christ event by indicating the significant political implications of Christianity and emphasizing the noetic equivalence of the more politically aware Greeks to the less politically aware Christians. A discussion of Voegelin's balancing of Christianity through noetic control will be offered in the conclusion, but at this point, it is important to note that Voegelin believed that this balanced interpretation of Christianity was not foreign to the vision itself. He writes, "These [Pauline] compromises were not an arbitrary addition; they were definitely implied as a possible evolution in the appearance

⁸⁹ Quoted in Morrissey, *Consciousness and Transcendence: The Theology of Eric Voegelin*, 309 n. 3.

⁹⁰ Thomas Heilke, who is generally critical of the Augustinian tradition (e.g. just-war theory), agrees that Voegelin has a preference for this tradition. See Heilke, *Eric Voegelin: In Quest of Reality* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 145-72.

and the teachings of Christ.”⁹¹ Thus, this distinction between the Christ event and Christianity or, perhaps better said, Christianities provides a helpful way to resolve this tension in Voegelin’s reading of Christianity.

Explaining Christianity’s relationship to modernity then becomes a subtle enterprise. The Christ event possesses clear implications for politics, in part because of its universality, while Christianity, focused on the *eschaton*, has historically been rather apolitical. Any correlation between Christianity and modernity then would be based on the spiritual weakness of Christianity itself (and subsequent misinterpretations or distortions of the vision) and not the Christ event. In other words, a major part of the blame given to Christianity is its fixation on the Beyond (and its mundaning effect on politics) that gave way to an “egophanic revolt.” But the Christ event, when properly interpreted, provides man with an ordering force, namely the universal man, not a disordering one.

⁹¹ Voegelin, “On Christianity (Letter to Alfred Schütz, 1 January, 1953),” 453.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Sometimes I have the feeling that my intellectual accomplishment for the church's problematic cultural situation (*Kulturproblematik*) is greater than the accomplishments of the professionals, whose job it is supposed to be.

—Eric Voegelin, “Letter to Friedrich Engel-Janosi, 11 May, 1951”

Having examined Voegelin's recovery of transcendence (through his theory of consciousness and theory of history) along with his reading of Christianity, this thesis now turns to provide a conclusion regarding its overarching question: “why would a thinker who acknowledges the epochal significance of Christian revelation give primacy to the Greeks in his best known discussions of human consciousness and political order?” This chapter will answer this question by first providing the strengths and weaknesses of the three hypotheses provided in the introduction. The chapter will then turn to a solution and offer three reasons that support it. Some concluding comments will then be given to Voegelin's Christian critics.

Three Hypotheses

The first hypothesis suggested in the introductory chapter was that Voegelin did not believe that Christianity could contribute to a political science. That is to say, he believed Christianity to be apolitical, and thus was necessarily reliant upon Greek philosophy to provide the polis with order. This hypothesis is an enticing answer. It has already been established that Voegelin's entire political philosophy is, for all intents and purposes, Greek. There is very little of anything Christian, particularly as seen in my first

two chapters dealing with Voegelin's recovery of transcendence. Of course, the fourth chapter on Christianity demonstrates Voegelin's belief that Christianity is superior in terms of differentiation. Yet, even then, the political implications of this differentiation are never really fleshed out to the extent to which Greek political philosophy is.

Furthermore, Voegelin affirms that in certain respects Christianity *is* apolitical: "If we mean by Christianity, in its origin, that sort of experience that has manifested itself in the writings of the New Testament, Christianity contains nothing about politics, but only, apocalyptically, about our way out of this world through the Second Coming of Christ."¹

Yet even if Voegelin's discussion of the political implications of Christianity is cryptic, it does exist. Even though this first hypothesis makes much sense of Voegelin's noetically-driven political philosophy and highlights the apolitical tendency of even "essential Christianity," there are other aspects of Christianity that possess political implications (e.g., the universalization of human dignity and rights). Thus, any answer to the question at hand must be able to deal with all of Voegelin's writing, and at this point the first hypothesis appears unable to accomplish this task.

The second hypothesis, taken from Murray Jardine, was that, for Voegelin, modernity with all its problems "is not a rebellion against Christianity but precisely a more complete realization of Christianity's own essence."² In this answer, Voegelin gave primacy to Greek philosophy over Christianity because in fact the latter was the spiritual root of the modern political mass movements. It stands to reason then that any

¹ Eric Voegelin, "In Search of the Ground," in *Published Essays 1953-65*, vol. 11, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 245.

² Murray Jardine, "Eric Voegelin's Interpretation(s) of Modernity: A Reconsideration of the Spiritual and Political Implications of Voegelin's Therapeutic Analysis," *Review of Politics* 57 (1995): 600-01.

recovery of order would avoid incorporating the foundation of the problem into its solution. This hypothesis is also tempting. There is no question that for Voegelin Christianity is much to blame for the modern problem, as Jardine brings to our attention. Ever since the Christ event Christians have misinterpreted, distorted, and manipulated the theophany. This mass amount of Christian deformation certainly accounts for Voegelin's essentially noetic political philosophy. His avoidance of these Christian "symbols" or, more properly, concepts (distorted symbols) is in part because these distortions are in fact at the root of the modern pathologies. And according to Voegelin, the noetic symbols have been distorted less and are certainly less known. Their obscurity helps, for familiarity often breeds distortion.

However, this hypothesis goes too far (as alluded to in my last chapter). It does not recognize Voegelin's important distinction between the Christ event, or "essential Christianity," and the distorted interpretations of that vision. Voegelin actually does believe that the Christ event must be a part of the restoration of order. And he does acknowledge the superiority of the event. The Christ event is one thing; its derailment is something else. And Voegelin does insist that the Christ event has implications for political science. Of course, it is at this point that Jardine argues that Voegelin's "Christian solution" is actually a radical reinterpretation of Christianity. He even goes so far as to call it a "new religion."³ This claim will be addressed later. But the point here is that Voegelin does not view Christianity as the *necessary* cause of modern political ideologues.

³ Ibid., 585.

The third, and final, hypothesis offered in the introductory chapter attempted to address the question by suggesting that Voegelin used noetic differentiation to restore political order through Christianity itself. Michael Federici goes in this direction:

Voegelin is primarily concerned with building a philosophical foundation on which to support a spiritual revival. He believes that the preliminary task is to recover the meaning of experience. With this as a precondition, Voegelin hopes to restore the primacy of meaningful spiritual conversion.⁴

In order for such a revival to take place, a Greek philosophic foundation would have to be laid in order for a Christian revival to take place. This hypothesis is reminiscent of Voegelin's comment on the relationship between Greek philosophy and Christianity in the early church: "[I]t will be necessary . . . to recover the question to which, in Hellenistic-Roman culture, the philosopher could understand the gospel as the answer."⁵ Of the three hypotheses, this one appears to make more sense of the textual evidence. As already discussed, Voegelin argued that Christianity incorporated noetic differentiation of Greek philosophy into its expression of reality. Voegelin's restoration of order using noetic insights from Greek philosophy does not determine in any way whether Voegelin is articulating a restoration of order as a Greek philosopher or a Christian philosopher. Added to this is the fact that Voegelin believes that Christianity provides insights into the order of being and that to ignore such differentiation would be irresponsible. Thus, it seems likely that Voegelin is operating as a Christian philosopher. Perhaps he is getting at something similar to this when he writes, "Sometimes I have the feeling that my intellectual accomplishment for the church's problematic cultural situation

⁴ Michael Federici, "Voegelin's Christian Critics," *Modern Age* 36 (1994): 331-40.

⁵ Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture," in *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934-1964*, edited by Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 142.

(*Kulturproblematik*) is greater than the accomplishments of the professionals, whose job it is supposed to be.”⁶

Yet even this hypothesis has a major weakness: it overlooks the significant criticisms that Voegelin provides of Christianity itself, highlighted in the second hypothesis. As a matter of fact, if one were to summarize the way Voegelin views Christianity in one word, it would be *dangerous*. It is somewhat presumptuous then to assume that Voegelin would be attempting to pave the way for a Christian “spiritual revival,” while at the same time suggesting that it is one of the major factors of the “deforming of humanity.”

The Solution: “Noetically-Controlled Christianity”

Unfortunately, none of these three hypotheses adequately accounts for the range within Voegelin’s philosophy, in particular the relationship between Greek philosophy and Christianity. Yet this does not leave us without an answer. Though these answers in and of themselves are insufficient, together they provide a nuanced answer that penetrates deep into the heart of a difficult question.

We are now prepared to provide a solution to the problem—Voegelin gave primacy to Greek philosophy over Christianity in order to redeem politics from a Gnostic disorder through a “noetically-controlled Christianity.” By noetically-controlled, I mean an expression of Christianity that takes into account the differentiation that the Christ event revealed, yet guards against potential imbalance by giving primacy to the noetic mode of differentiation provided by Greek philosophy. This answer accounts for the

⁶ Voegelin, “Letter to Friedrich Engel-Janosi, 11 May, 1951,” quoted in *History of Political Ideas*, vol. 1: *Hellenism, Rome, and Early Christianity*, vol. 19, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Athanasios Moulakis (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 24 n. 28.

indications of a restoration of order through Christianity that Federici picks up on in Voegelin's thought, while taking into consideration his critique of *Christianity* as deforming humanity. It also accounts for Voegelin's Greek theory of consciousness and Greek theory of history identified in chapters two and three.

Why would Voegelin believe a "noetically-controlled Christianity" to be a good idea? This answer consists of the three partial answers given in the introduction: (1) the superiority of the noetic analysis of the order of being at some points, (2) the tendency toward imbalance in the pneumatic mode, and (3) the distortion of the Christian symbols. Two of which are inherent in the two theophanic modes themselves; the other concerns Voegelin's contextual situation.

First, Christianity is in some sense less adequate in expressing the human condition. Voegelin writes, "[T]he noetic analysis of the metaxy has gone as far as in the gospel movement, *and in some points superior to anything we find in the gospel* [italics added]."⁷ This precision of the noetic analysis was demonstrated in my second chapter on Voegelin's theory of consciousness. For Voegelin, this precision was in part justification for giving primacy to the Greeks. It would stand to reason that, if one is seeking to restore the order of being, preference would be given to the most exact analysis of the order. Various reasons could be offered for this superiority, in particular the noetic emphasis on the structure (the order of being) rather than the movement of history. Given this focus, a more exact analysis of the structure would be expected.

Christianity's neglect of noetic control and subsequent imbalance through apocalyptic fixation provides a second reason for Greek primacy. (This neglect also

⁷ Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture," 173.

provides more support for the previous reason.) This point was made in the third and fourth chapters, particularly the contrast between noetic and pneumatic expressions (third chapter) and Voegelin's concerns about Paul's "metastatic expectations" (fourth chapter).

The third reason is the over-familiarity of the Christian symbols in comparison to the relative obscurity of the classical philosophical language. In response to Thomas Altizer, Voegelin writes, "As far as my own vocabulary is concerned [when discussing Christianity], I am very conscious of not relying on the language of doctrine."⁸ The problem with symbols that are overused is that they become "opaque." That is to say, the symbols themselves have become literalized and have lost their original meaning. This point was made in the fourth chapter in the discussion of Christ (the Christ of the incarnation vs. the Christ of dogma). Voegelin intentionally avoids words, such as "Christ," because they have become opaque. Instead of the experience, the "pleromatic *metaxy*," the word "Christ" calls to mind concepts, or dogmas, that are mere propositions removed from their engendering experiences. Thus, Voegelin uses words such as *metaxy*, because they are not as well known, to avoid distorting reality by relaying an opaque symbol.

A Conversation with Voegelin's Christian Critics

Voegelin knew that this noetically-controlled Christianity or "essential Christianity," as he called it, would be criticized by Christian scholars. He was right. Voegelin has been criticized for approaching Christianity from a "standpoint extraneous

⁸ Voegelin, "Response to Professor Altizer's 'A New History and a New but Ancient God?,'" in *Published Essays 1966-1985*, vol. 12, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1990), 294.

to it;”⁹ ignoring the Incarnation;¹⁰ ignoring the historical-ness of Jesus;¹¹ and missing “the Gospel as salvation *in the specifically Christian sense*.”¹² Stephen Tonsor writes, “Voegelin the ‘philosopher’ believed in the God of the philosophers and tried again and again, unsuccessfully I believe, to ‘put on Christ.’”¹³

The real question is whether Voegelin’s account, when understood properly, really distorts Christianity? It is important to give Voegelin the benefit of the doubt for a moment and not come to a hasty conclusion. What justification would Voegelin have to noetically-control Christianity? There are three considerations that help put his account in proper perspective.

First, Voegelin’s justification for a “noetically-controlled Christianity” is the constant structure of human experience. Many of Voegelin’s Christian critics have accused Voegelin of essentially Platonizing Christianity. There is a sense in which this is correct, as evidenced in his critique of Paul. But this doesn’t get to the heart of Voegelin’s philosophy. He is arguing for a noetic control based on the constant structure of human experience, certainly as it was articulated most precisely by the Greeks. It seems wrong to argue that it is in fact a “Greek reading of Christianity.” This criticism actually approaches Voegelin from a standpoint extraneous to his work. That is to say,

⁹ Gerhart Niemeyer, “Eric Voegelin’s Philosophy and the Drama of Mankind,” *Modern Age* 20 (1976): 35.

¹⁰ Harold Weatherby, “Myth, Fact, and History: Voegelin on Christianity,” *Modern Age* 22 (1978): 149.

¹¹ Frederick Wilhelmsen, *Christianity and Political Philosophy* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1978), 203.

¹² Bruce Douglass, “A Diminished Gospel: A Critique of Voegelin’s Interpretation of Christianity,” in *Eric Voegelin’s Search for Order in History*, edited by Stephen McKnight (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 146.

¹³ Stephen Tonsor, “The God Question,” *Modern Age* 35 (1992): 66.

this criticism assumes a dichotomy, or at least a very strong incompatibility, between Greek philosophy and Christianity. Jardine's conclusion regarding Voegelin's critique of Paul highlights this point: "It could alternatively be argued that the real problem is that the Greek and Hebrew symbolizations of reality are actually incompatible, and that Voegelin's tendency to condemn the biblical tradition even as he upholds it may result from attempting to force Hebraic symbolisms into Greek categories."¹⁴ However, Voegelin's test of truth is not Plato or Aristotle, or even philosophy for that matter; it is, interesting enough, "unoriginality."¹⁵ In other words, Voegelin gauges the Judeo-Christian tradition, not by the Greeks, but by the one emerging reality that encompasses both pneumatic and noetic theophanies. Voegelin justifies his noetic-control, because he does not see an incompatibility between Greek philosophy and Christianity. Furthermore, it actually is not the Christian insight, but *Christianity*, that needs control.

Second, the distortion of the constant structure of human experience has horrendous political consequences. His critique of Paul provides a case in point. According to Voegelin, Paul's interpretation distorted the structure of being by *expecting* transfiguration in time, without dying, which is a distortion of *the* human condition. This interpretation led in time to a derailment and a disordering of political life. Once the transfiguration never came, followers began to desire certainty, which produced increasing frustration with the uncertainty of faith. This frustration led to revolts, attempting to "immanentize the *eschaton*." Now one can quibble over Voegelin's

¹⁴ Jardine, "Eric Voegelin's Interpretation(s) of Modernity: A Reconsideration of the Spiritual and Political Implications of Voegelin's Therapeutic Analysis," 603.

¹⁵ Voegelin, "Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History," in *Published Essays 1966-1985*, vol. 12, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1990).

interpretation of Paul, but his noetic-control appears beyond critique, namely that such Christian “metastatic expectation,” Pauline or not, distorts reality and, in so doing, has negative political implications. A restoration of political order through attempting to control a distortion of reality appears quite justified.

Again, it is important to emphasize that Voegelin is not criticizing the Christ event, or “essential Christianity,” but is concerned with a distorted interpretation of that event. The major concern of the Christian scholars is not Voegelin’s critique of the “egophanic revolt;” there is no complaint about his indicting Nazism for manipulating Christian eschatology. Rather, the concern is over a sensed criticism of Christianity itself. A critique that Voegelin believes is impossible. There is no such thing as “Christianity” for Voegelin; there are only interpretations of the Christ event. Thus, he is only critiquing Paul’s *interpretation* of the Christ event; the Christ event itself Voegelin is quite eager to maintain.

A final consideration, albeit less profound, is Voegelin’s vocation as a political philosopher. Voegelin is not a theologian, arguing for Christian exclusivity; as a matter of fact, Voegelin insists that he is not using Christianity in any religious sense in his political thought.¹⁶ And yet David Walsh sees a problem here: “The emphasis on increasing differentiation . . . appears to have eclipsed the liberating experience of ‘the love of God poured out for us’ (Rom. 5:5). For surely the core of the Christian dispensation is the experience of grace that Voegelin only acknowledges in passing.”¹⁷ And yet when we acknowledge the consideration that Voegelin is not emphasizing the

¹⁶ Voegelin, “On Christianity (Letter to Alfred Schütz, 1 January, 1953),” 449.

¹⁷ David Walsh, “Voegelin’s Response to the Disorder of the Age,” *Review of Politics* 46 (1984): 282-83.

exclusive features of Christianity (though certainly acknowledging their existence, such as Marion doctrines), Walsh's concern becomes less of an issue. Even in his political thought, he is not developing a *Christian polis* but is attempting to restore political order for man, Christian or otherwise. Thus, an attempt to develop this sort of political science is justified in emphasizing commonality (e.g., equivalences), instead of particularity. That is to say, if Christianity has something to say politically, it must be gained from the common structures of the human experience, not taken simply from those who assent to a particular set of dogmas. Christian theologians do this consistently with the use of natural law. The important difference is that Voegelin illustrates that even Christian dogma, when understood properly, expresses the common experience of man. It is somewhat ironic that Christian political philosophers, seeking to offer political insight, would criticize Voegelin for neglecting to address Christian dogma at length, a very divisive enterprise, or for neglecting to use specifically Christian language (e.g., "the restoration of a broken relationship with God or the creation of a 'new man.'")

Even with these previous considerations, it is still important to ask whether Voegelin's "translation" of Christianity alters "the *substance* of the meanings of the symbols originally conveyed?"¹⁸ Though a satisfactory answer cannot be given, the question can provide a tentative answer concerning one issue, namely the criticism that Voegelin does not articulate the gospel in the true Christian sense. Bruce Douglass writes, "It is true that Voegelin uses soteriological language. . . . It [Voegelin's language] is more the attainment of meaning than the restoration of a broken relationship with God or the creation of a 'new man.' Rather than transcending what Voegelin calls the 'tension

¹⁸ Douglass, "A Diminished Gospel: A Critique of Voegelin's Interpretation of Christianity," 153.

of existence,' it simply reflects it."¹⁹ John Hallowell writes, "It is not clear if there is any sense in which Voegelin regards the Gospel as 'good news.'"²⁰

By focusing on the priestly function of Jesus's death, it will become clear that Voegelin offers the gospel in exactly the Christian sense. This priestly function is one of the major ways to understand the Christian gospel. It would seem that, if Voegelin affirms this function, the criticism has much less weight. To Alfred Schütz, Voegelin writes, "[H]e [Jesus] was a mediator performing his function not for an historically existing society but for all men (This was what caused the tension between the Jewish-Christians of Jerusalem and the Paulinians.)"²¹ It is this *universal* priesthood that occupies much of the biblical literature on Christ's redemptive role. This is especially seen in the universal inclusion of the Gentiles, the very point Voegelin mentions. In a letter to Timothy, Paul opens this way: "This [prayer] is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires *all men* to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and *one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*, who gave Himself as a ransom for all [italics added]." This is exactly the insight into reality that Voegelin is symbolizing. The salvific role of Christ is also discussed in "The Gospel and Culture:" "All other men have no more than their ordinary share of this fullness (*pepleromenoi*) through accepting the truth of its full presence in the Christ, who by his iconic existence, is 'the head of all rule (*arche*) and authority (*exouisa*).'"²²

¹⁹ Ibid., 146.

²⁰ John Hallowell, "Existence in Tension: Man in Search of His Humanity," in *Eric Voegelin's Search for Order in History*, edited by Stephen A. McKnight (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University, 1978), 123.

²¹ Voegelin, "On Christianity (Letter to Alfred Schütz, 1 January, 1953)," 454.

²² Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture," 158.

Thus, it does not appear that Voegelin is neglecting the “good news.” Even by expressing equivalency and using language such as *metaxy* to symbolize the Christian insight, Jesus is portrayed as the one mediator between God and man. Voegelin cannot be blamed for his use of language, the biblical authors themselves expressed the “good news” from borrowed language. Jesus is seen as the “son of God,” an older cosmological expression that even predates Israel. The entire notion of a priestly mediator finds its genesis in Israel. The early church fathers were in some sense dependent on the precision of the Greek language to develop Christian doctrine. Thus, even with Voegelin’s language, this expression does not strip Christianity of its essence.

Voegelin also took great pains to demonstrate that his reading of Christianity, even his criticisms, was not beyond Christianity, or in some way anti-Christian. It was rather developed within the Christian differentiation. Voegelin addressed this in response to Thomas Altizer: “I am equally conscious of not going beyond the orbit of Christianity.”²³ This response was to two points raised by Altizer: (1) Voegelin’s preference for translating the Greek work *theotes* as divine reality, instead of godhead, and (2) his use of the Christian medieval phrase, *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding), to include every faith, not only Christianity. Concerning his translation of *theotes* as divine reality, he writes, “I have preferred *divine reality* because it renders best *the author’s intention* to denote a nonpersonal reality which allows for degrees of participation in its fullness while remaining the God beyond the In-Between of existence [italics added].”²⁴ In dealing with the equivalence of every faith (properly understood),

²³ Voegelin, “Response to Professor Altizer’s ‘A New History and a New but Ancient God?,’” 294.

²⁴ Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture,” 158.

Voegelin again attempts to develop his interpretation from *within* Christianity, not from without. He writes:

Even this expansion of the *fides*, however, to all of the experiences of divine reality in which history constitutes itself, cannot be said to go beyond 'Christianity.' For it is the Christ of the Gospel of John who says of himself, 'Before Abraham was, I am' (8:58); and it is Thomas Aquinas who considers the Christ to be the head of the *corpus mysticum* that embraces, not only Christians, but all mankind from the creation of the world to its end.²⁵

This reading of Christ's salvific work is even being argued for by certain Catholic and Protestant theologians, completely detached from Voegelin's project.

The major point here is not to defend Voegelin's reading of Christianity but to demonstrate that it is in fact a *Christian* reading. In other words, Voegelin's Christian critics should not accuse him of addressing Christianity from a standpoint extraneous to it, but rather provide a critique of his interpretation of Christianity. One could argue point by point, passage by passage. The point could be raised that Voegelin overemphasizes a certain biblical passage or misunderstands a certain church father. This understanding allows one to be justified in offering criticism, without having to abandon his entire project.

In sum, this thesis has answered the question concerning Voegelin's deference to the Greeks over Christianity in some regards. This deference is rooted in an attempt to noetically-control Christianity. This thesis analyzed Voegelin's theory of consciousness and theory of history, along with extensive reflection on his understanding of Christianity. The analysis of his political philosophy was essential in order to establish this deference. Voegelin's deference was based on the precision of noetic analysis, the

²⁵ Voegelin, "Response to Professor Altizer's 'A New History and a New but Ancient God?,'" 294.

tendency toward imbalance in Christianity, and the over-familiarity of the Christian symbols.

In conclusion, on his death bed, Voegelin expressed to his wife, Lissy, that “At last I understand Christianity!” Perhaps the decades of careful reflection on philosophy and theology were being reaped, or perhaps Voegelin had experienced a pneumatic irruption in his soul, similar to that of Paul and thousands of Christians in history after him. Regardless, Lissy’s response that “Yes, Eric, but you’re going to take it with you!” indicates the frustration that many of us would have trying to attempt to understand this difficult topic—Voegelin and Christianity. Yet there is no doubt that this would be what Voegelin would have wanted. Voegelin spent his entire life attempting to restore the balance to the human condition; he no doubt spent countless days wrestling with the pull and counter-pull in his own psyche; he searched his whole life. Whatever he finally understood about Christianity, whether a vision of the Beyond or man’s transfiguration, he would no doubt wish to keep that in mystery. And Voegelin left us to figure out Christianity and its forming and deforming effects in history on our own, and there is something that seems refreshingly right about that.

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