Eric Voegelin's Philosophy and the Drama of Mankind

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NEARLY TWO DECADES AGO there appeared the first three volumes of Eric Voegelin's exemplary quest for a theoretically intelligible order of history (Vol. I, *Israel and Revelation*; Vol. II, *The World of the Polis*; Vol. III, *Plato and Aristotle*). The plan projected three more volumes: Empire and Christianity, The Protestant Centuries, and The Crisis of Western Civilization. When the fourth volume was actually published in 1974, its title, *The Ecumenic Age,* indicated that the author's ideas had undergone a considerable change during the intervening years. In the Introduction Voegelin announces not only "a break with the program" of *Order and History,* but also the partial abandonment of his former views on the course of history, although the revised concept still issues from the rigorous application of the original principle guiding the entire work: "The order of history is the history of order." That work seems to have attained its climax in *The Ecumenic Age,* since volume V, under the title *In Search of Order,* will conclude the project with a presentation of studies of contemporary problems that led to the whole undertaking.

The turn which Eric Voegelin's thought has taken between 1957 and 1974 was unexpected. Let us see what the first three volumes induced his readers to anticipate and what actually came forth. A word of caution first: No overview of Voegelin's work can possibly claim completeness, for Eric Voegelin has not developed anything like an abstract and logically closed system. From the beginning, he has set out to "find what he could find," and to grasp the problems of order through its manifold of historical manifestations, each of them in its own terms. Thus his pages are packed with the analyses of cultures, situations, texts, symbols, and underlying experiences of which each has shed much light on particulars, so much so that some of these "particulars" have appeared as separate books and others, in the form of articles, are eagerly consulted for references. Eric Voegelin has always maintained that he has proceeded empirically, *i.e.,* in deference to what actually has occurred in history. He has analyzed those occurrences so thoroughly, however, that one cannot possibly report on the quantity and quality of these analyses short of encyclopedic form. Comprehension of these materials could be accomplished only through theoretical principles, some of which must have antedated the work on particulars. On the other hand, the work of sympathetically understanding historical manifestations of order yielded theoretical insights, one is almost tempted to say, *a posteriori,* and the perception of a context of history as a whole, in which these manifestations occur or rather, group themselves, was also a purely theoretical achievement. There is, then, an encyclopedic as well as a philosophical aspect to Eric Voegelin's work, so that the reader seeking to grasp Eric Voegelin's philosophy finds himself again and again distracted, or rather attracted, by the many fascinating excursions into hitherto little known ter-

rain, except that these really are no excursions but the main path of the quest. So follow him one must, carefully trying to keep hold of the philosophical structure of the inquiry even while being astonished by the wealth of new facts.

Turning to the first three volumes: what, after reading them appeared to have been "the history of order"? It is seen as a process of tension, and even progression, between two types of order, the original and ubiquitous "cosmological empire," and the order emerging from what Voegelin has called "the leap in being." Cosmological order, represented in the ancient Near East by Egypt and Mesopotamia, understood itself as a compact unit of gods, men, nature, and society. The king, either himself divine or divinely commissioned, secured the tie between the gods ruling the natural forces of regenerative fertility and men, through the order of society as part of the cosmic order. A tight package of symbols, each integrated with all the others, all together bespeaking the oneness of being and order. Between 800 and 300 B.C., however, there occurred a number of "spiritual outbursts" which led to a break with the cosmological order and the perception of a higher and "truer" way of life. Voegelin mentions four of these "leaps." First came that of Israel, through Moses and the prophets; next that of Greece, through the great philosophers from Parmenides to Aristotle; then India, through the Buddha and Mahavira; finally China, through Confucius and Lao-tzu. Voegelin showed the two latter leaps to have remained somewhat incomplete and focusses his attention on Israel and Greece, the analysis of which in his first three volumes is itself a breakthrough in historical scholarship. While the cosmological order understands men as living in a natural and social cosmos that is "full of gods," the "spiritual outburst" consists in a human experience of participation in a transcendent divinity beyond both the natural and social tangible existence. The experience has the character of a discovery, not only of the transcendent god but also of that in man which can respond to and participate in, the divine. The discovery results in a depreciation of the cosmological symbols of order and the perception and practice of a "new life," which appears as a "leap" in being, rising above what went before. In his *Programmschrift, The New Science of Politics* (1952), Eric Voegelin points out that any society understands itself as representative of transcendental truth, and he distinguishes between "cosmological," "anthropological," and "soteriological" truth. Quoting Clement of Alexandria to the effect that Christianity has "two Old Testaments," that of the Hebrew and that of the Greek tradition, he leaves a hint that in the Christian "leap" the two former leaps of being have converged.

On the basis of the first three volumes, then, the history of order appears as a single "course," a line which at one point, that of the two parallel leaps, shows something like a bulge but then again narrows to a single line. How could the reader, at this point, picture to himself the completion of the project? On the encyclopedic side, Voegelin had covered the ancient Near East, Greece, and, in his *New Science*, a crucial segment of Roman history. In the same book and in his *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism* (German 1959, English 1968), he had dealt with modern times. The great gap was obviously the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Regarding the philosophical aspect, Voegelin had characterized the "leaps" as something higher and better than what went before. What was it that made the difference? Voegelin called it "differentiation," newly gained deeper insight into aspects of order not clearly distinguished in an earlier compactness of symbols. Israel differentiated righteousness from fertility and security, the people understanding themselves as standing over against a God whose will is righteousness. In the case of Greece, the differentiation was the discovery of the soul as the "sensorium of transcendence," so that in the depth of the soul Socrates and Plato could recollect a higher vision of being, conver-

sion to which amounted to a new life. Here, surely, were philosophical judgments. On the other hand, Voegelin's view of modern times is contained in the chapter title, "Gnosticism—The Nature of Modernity." Gnosticism here functions as a pejorative term, following modern scholarship which had shown the Gnostic religions of the second to fourth centuries to have distorted already existing symbols of order and to have perverted the entire notion of "knowledge."

Finding in modern ideologies a pattern similar to ancient Gnosticism, Voegelin came to speak of the "deformation" that had taken place in modern times, and of "ideologies" as the abandonment of reason. Thus, both with regard to the leaps in being and to modern times Voegelin arrived at judgments about the contents of beliefs. Nor were these judgments emotionally pronounced. On the contrary, they emerged from the most rigorous scholarly treatment of the problems involved, the most precise definition of categories, an attitude of the strictest personal detachment. The great excitement generated by the publication of Voegelin's works must be seen chiefly as caused by his demonstration that values can be treated scientifically. Both "scientific" and "values" should here be put in quotation marks, because Voegelin used science in the classical sense and not in the reductionist meaning imposed by the Positivists; he also would never speak of "values" since that term, of Positivist coinage, had come to denote the utter relativity of wholly subjective "preferences," so that it seemed to make sense to speak of "the values of a dope-peddler." It is precisely because Voegelin sees the ontological context of the good that he had found again the mode in which a scholar could, in the strictest discipline, make distinctions and arrive at judgments about the quality of beliefs. Since Voegelin had formed concepts of "lower" and "higher" being, since he had contrasted rationality with "deformation" and philosophy with "ideology," and had compared historical types of existence in terms of good, he obviously had developed his philosophy, of which the reader could expect to see a fuller and more explicit statement. Voegelin's *Anamnesis* (in German, 1966) may be considered a start in that direction. That book, however, was never translated, possibly meaning that the author looked on it as an interim station. On the other hand, volume IV, when it finally appeared, continued the whole work along wholly unexpected lines.

First, on the plane of pragmatic events, *The Ecumenic Age* moves not forward from Greece and Rome, but rather turns back, covering to some extent the same ground as before. The motive came partly from Voegelin's discovery of a new configuration in history, a new "age." Karl Jaspers had proposed calling the period from 800 to 200 B.C. "the Axis Time," a concept which Voegelin had rejected since it focused on "spiritual outbursts" like Zoroaster, Parmenides, and Socrates, but excluded Jesus Christ and St. Paul. Nor did Toynbee's outline of twenty-one civilizations, rising and falling from time immemorial, seem to him to fit the facts. He found, on the basis of ubiquitous records, that the ecumenic empires were structures *sui generis* transcending the boundaries of civilizations, and that they would entail the kind of spiritual outbursts that occurred. He showed that after the decline of the ecumenic empires there ensued, from their ruins, the generation of the civilizations we know, so that civilizations are of far more recent origin than Toynbee assumed.

The ecumenic age began with Cyrus' conquest of Media in 550 B.C., rapidly followed by that of Lydia and that of Babylon, and ended around 546 A.D. with the decline of the Roman empire, so that it comprised the Achaemenian, Macedonian, Maurya, Seleucid, and Roman empires. Voegelin's volume thus covers a period of roughly 1100 years. While the reader's eager hope to read all about the Middle Ages is disappointed, in other respects he may find what he was looking for, although again in unexpected form. Voegelin does finally turn to Christianity, but only

through an analysis of St. Paul's "vision of the Resurrected." Voegelin's own philosophy also moves toward fuller and more complete articulation, but does this still through the treatment of historical materials. The lengthy and very meaty Introduction, the central chapters on "The Process of History" and "Conquest and Exodus," and the concluding chapter, "Universal Humanity," are chiefly philosophical. Even here, however, Voegelin philosophizes not by himself but with the help and in the company of the privileged individuals to whom, in the course of centuries, epochal insights have been granted. Thus the reader will now have to give up his expectation of seeing the centuries of Christian culture included in *Order and History*, since volume five is not intended to deal with them. On the other hand, he can begin, as we shall do a little later, to put together the chief elements of Voegelin's philosophy. Finally, he will note the revision of Voegelin's former concept of the "course of history." Indeed, the revision of this view and the articulation of Voegelin's own philosophy are one and the same process.

The reader becomes aware of this mixture in the first chapter, "Historiogenesis." This is Voegelin's term for the kind of symbolic speculation that traces the background of a society's present *res gestae* to the ultimate ground and beginning of all things. As a type of speculation it has largely escaped attention, and Voegelin is the first one to give it a name. Voegelin places it in the same class with theogony, anthropogony, and cosmogony, together with which it forms an aggregate covering the whole field of being, with historiogenesis obviously constituting the time dimension. Voegelin notes that there is something like an equivalence between historiogenetic, cosmogonic, anthropogonic, and theogonic speculations; indeed, they all borrow from each other. He also finds that historiogenetic speculations of the Sumerians are an equivalent of the structurally similar speculations of Hegel, so that historiogenesis is "virtually omnipresent" and not characteristic merely of archaic man. It is findings like these, scattered around his chapters, that induce Voegelin to abandon the contradistinctions of periods and types of order that dominated the first three volumes:

> The constancies and equivalences adumbrated work havoc with such settled topical blocks as myth and philosophy, natural reason and revelation, philosophy and religion, or the Orient with its cyclical time and Christianity with its linear history. And what is modern about the modern mind, one may ask, if Hegel, Comte, or Marx, in order to create an image of history that will support their ideological imperialism, still use the same techniques for distorting the reality of history as their Sumerian predecessors? (68)

Voegelin is obviously beginning to work with "constants" of consciousness which seem to appear in culturally different but structurally similar "equivalents." Nor does he find a sharp line separating historiogenesis and speculations about the cosmos in which things exist and perish. "The cosmos," in turn, "is not a thing among others; it is the background of reality against which all existing things exist; it has reality in the mode of non-existence," (72) a "fundamental experience in early societies just as much as in later ones." The answers to this tension produced at various times in various cultures are, again, equivalents of each other,

> for the answers make sense only in relation to the questions which they answer; the questions, furthermore, make sense only in relation to the concrete experiences of reality from which they have arisen; and the concrete experiences, together with their linguistic articulation, finally make sense only in the cultural context which sets limits to both the direction and range of intelligible differentiation. Only the complex of experience-question-answer as a whole is a constant of consciousness. . . . No

> answer, thus, is the ultimate truth in whose possession mankind could live happily forever after, because no answer can abolish the historical process of consciousness from which it has emerged. (75)

Here is historical relativity but no relativism, insistence on ontic constants but no essentialism, a notion of history that consists not of the series of factual events in time, a concept of consciousness as concretely conditioned but yet pertaining to universal mankind.

These assumptions established, Voegelin now outlines the age he has termed "ecumenic," since the word "ecumene," meaning the humanly inhabited globe, played a key role in the self-understanding of men living in that time. "Ecumene" occurs in two different contexts. First, it means the object of actual or potential unification by conquest, as in Polybius; second, it means the potential range of desired unification by the same spiritual conversion, as in St. Paul. Voegelin speaks of these as the "pragmatic" and the "spiritual" ecumene, the two being in intricate and complex relationship with each other. The great conquests overran and upset many ethnic societies whose members' existence was threatened by senselessness through the destruction of their political and religious order. They were not the only ones to have problems, though. The conquerors, pushing toward the mythical "horizon," the end of the world, did not know in concrete terms how far to expand their rule, nor did they know what it was they were eventually ruling, so that they were threatened by the specter of a huge power organization without spiritual meaning. On the other hand, the uprooted population of many places, deprived of the meaning of their small ethnic societies, partly responded by outburst of universal spirituality which in turn formed movements in search of a people whose order they could become. "This millennial process of dissociation of order, its vicissitudes to the end in the rise of orthodox imperical civilizations, is what we have called the Ecumenic Age." (145)

Voegelin's decision to focus his studies on antiquity, leaving out not only the ecumenic empires of Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, the Ottomans, and the Hapsburgs, but also the entire Christian culture of the Latin West and the Greek-Russian East, must remain a puzzlement. All he reveals about his motive is contained in the statement that "the men living in the Ecumenic Age were forced by the events into reflections on the meaning of their course," and thus raised "the issues of a philosophy of history." (171) Voegelin the philosopher, we remember, relies on the exegesis of texts reflecting historical but paradigmatic experiences. He may have considered the 1100 years straddling Christ's birth richer soil for such kinds of find. That means, however, that he reflected on history through the mind of Plato rather than through that of Augustine, and on being through Parmenides rather than Thomas Aquinas. The gap of Christianity will remain permanent in his work, because the "reflections" of the Ecumenic Age struck him as more significant. One of the issues close to his interest is that of identity. A mighty historical process was going on, but who or what was its subject? It was not a process of "Babylon or Egypt, of Persia, Macedonia, or Rome, of the Greek or Phoenician city states, of the Maurya or Parthian empires, of Israel or the Bactrian kingdoms, though all of these societies were somehow involved in it." (171) It might be that "the ecumene" was the hitherto unsuspected subject of the historical process," but the ecumene was not anything like a given entity; rather it was a *telos*, an aspiration. The problem once identified, Voegelin follows the speculations of Herodotus, Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle, all of whom he sees as depending and centering on the basic insight formulated by Anaximander:

> The origin (*arche*) of things is the Apeiron. . . . It is necessary for things to

> perish into that from which they were born; for they pay one another penalty for their injustice (*adikia*) according to the ordinance of Time. (174)

Behind the up-and-down of existing things Anaximander saw the One which he called "the Boundless." One notices the equivalence of this concept to Voegelin's "non-existence." "The process" is the coming of "things" from the Boundless and their going back again, a process of necessity "according to the ordinance of Time." The great thinkers who reflected on the meaning of the historical process formed part of a "field of noetic consciousness" in which the thinkers could toss each other their discoveries in full awareness that they all were talking about the same reality that Anaximander had identified. Herodotus sees that

> "the thing" called man does not participate in (the process) with the whole of his existence. A part of man has been exempted. For man has split into a power-self that is his own and another part of his self that cannot escape participation, though its participation is experienced as victimization by the process. (180)

He also found that "conquest is exodus, for one must leave behind what one has in order to conquer." (181) It was Plato, however, who achieved the most important development of Anaximander's insight, in *Philebus* 16c-17a, noting that all things have their being "from the One and Many, and conjoin in themselves Limited (*peras*) and Unlimited (*apeirian*)," so that the domain of human knowledge is "in-between" the One and the Unlimited. The Greek word for in-between is *metaxy* which in Voegelin's vocabulary becomes a noun, the Metaxy, invoking something like a space but also serving as something like a synonym for both the *condicio humana* and "human nature." The "dialogue of mankind" is carried on in the language characteristic of the "noetic consciousness" which in the philosophers supplanted the imagery of the cosmological myth, as it discovered the mind as a movement of the soul toward the transcendence; also "discovered the discovery to have meaning as an event in history."

This "noetic consciousness," the "discovery of the mind," as Bruno Snell has called it, occupies Voegelin throughout the central chapters of volume four. On the one hand, it remains anchored in the basic insight of Anaximander and thus remains aware that "man can neither conquer reality nor walk out of it," that "no imperial expansion can reach the receding horizon; no exodus from bondage is an exodus from the *condicio humana*; no turning away from the Apeiron, or turning against it, can prevent the return to it through death." (215) In one respect, "things" remain what they have always been. But human consciousness changes, and discovers its own movements as events in history. Voegelin analyzes what actually happens:

> Participation in the noetic movement is not an autonomous project of action but the response to a theophanic event . . . or its persuasive communication. To this revelatory movement . . . from the divine ground, man can respond by his questioning and searching, but the theophanic event itself is not at his command. (217)

"Noesis," from the Greek *nous* which, although usually translated as "mind," is defined by Aristotle as "itself divine or the most divine thing in us," (*Nic. Ethics* 1177a15) thus must be understood as the openness of consciousness toward that "eminent" reality which is "more real" than things. In this openness the world with its "things" becomes intelligible. "The life of reason," concludes Voegelin, "is thus firmly rooted in a revelation." (228) The revelation, or "theophany," however, has also an unbalancing effect in that its experience as a dynamic movement of consciousness has a way of opening up the expectation of "an ultimate transfiguration of reality," *i.e.*, a "new world" in which "things" would no longer be what they

have been so far. "The philosopher has to cope with the paradox of a recognizably structured process that is recognizably moving beyond its structure." (227) In a poignant summary of his findings about the noetic consciousness as a movement forming "part of the structure" Voegelin states: "The history of revelation reveals the Beyond of history and revelation," in the sense that the theophanic event is a "response to an irruption of the divine in the psyche," which in each case has a specific content but will continue as a movement "if the phase of the response that has reached the stage of symbolization is sensed to be no more than penultimate." (233) The "divine irruption" and the "human responses" are again constants, while the content" of the revelation and of the responses varies in time and space. Voegelin sees the variety of revelations as equivalents: "The God who appeared to the philosophers and who elicited from Parmenides the exclamation 'Is!,' was the same God who revealed himself to Moses as the 'I am who (or what) I am,' as the God who is what he is in the concrete theophany to which man responds." (229) With a view to the danger of losing, from the unbalancing effect of the theophany, the primary experience of the cosmos represented by Anaximander's dictum, Voegelin proclaims "the postulate of balance" which, he says, is "the task incumbent on the philosopher." (228) The entire discussion of the noetic consciousness as a movement incited by theophanies and accompanied by the perennial danger of losing out of sight the world of things over its vision of the Beyond, is Voegelin's description of "the process of history." Here is the core of Voegelin's thought.

At this point, the reader's patient waiting is rewarded, for now Voegelin turns to Christianity, if only in a chapter of thirty-three pages rather than a whole book, and only to "the Pauline Vision of the Resurrected." Since many of Voegelin's readers will be Christians let it be clear that to this writer, who considers himself a Christian, the chapter was deeply disappointing. The treatment is dominated by the notion of equivalences: St. Paul, on the one hand, is put into the same category with Plato, with St. Paul's performance receiving a grade of "superior," and on the other hand with Hegel, who comes out worst. Paul's vision is analyzed in the terms of "noetic consciousness," even though Voegelin concedes to St. Paul the discovery of "pneumatic consciousness." The dynamic has shifted from the paradox of reality to the abolition of the paradox, *i.e.* toward the vision of a reality in which both disorder and mortality are vanquished by God. Similarly, the dynamic has shifted "from the human search to the divine gift, from man's ascent toward God through the tension of Eros to God's descent toward man through the tension of the Agape." (246) Paul's construction is called "a myth," the story of the fall from and the return to, the imperishable state of creation intended by divine creativity. Thus St. Paul, for the first time, brings into sight the eventual end of the movement thereby revealing its full meaning, which is why "the Pauline myth is distinguished by its superior degree of differentiation" over Plato. (250) So now we learn about the advantage of this superior differentiation in the series of philosophical equivalents. "What becomes visible in the new luminosity . . . is not only the structure of consciousness *itself (in classical* language: the nature of man), but also the structure of 'an advance' in the process of reality," which enables us to draw the conclusion that "'history' in the sense of an area in reality in which the insight into the meaning of existence advances is the history of theophany." (252) Paul excels in this series because through him

> the transcosmic God and his Agape were revealed as the mover in the theophanic events which constitute meaning in history. . . . Paul, furthermore, differentiated fully the experience of the directional movement by articulating its goal. . . . Finally, Paul has fully differentiated the experience of man as the site

> where the movement of reality becomes luminous in its actual occurrence. In Paul's myth, God emerges victorious, because his protagonist is man. He is the creature in whom God can incarnate himself with the fullness of his divinity, transfiguring man into the God-man. (251)

The treatment strikes me as unsatisfactory on a number of counts. The title is misleading, since "the vision" is the entire "speculation" of St. Paul as analyzed by Voegelin, leaving out of consideration the single, brief vision on the road to Damascus which was Paul's encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. St. Paul knew Jesus to have been a contemporary person who was born, lived, preached, performed miracles, "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried." Apart from the problems of the "historical Jesus," the facticity of Jesus himself separates Christian theology as a type from all myths and philosophical speculations. Since Voegelin points out that Plato's myth was an *alethinos logos*, a true story, he should have allowed a special category also for St. Paul's story. Myths and philosophical speculations are induced by the ubiquitous "mystery of meaning" which Eric Voegelin has done more than anyone else to illuminate. In that respect it is true that they are equivalents of one another. Christianity, however, was born from amazement about a particular person Jesus, his deeds, teachings, and such claims as that men in order to gain their lives must lose them for his sake, that it will be he whom men will face in the ultimate judgment, that there will be a new covenant with God in his blood, that he would die to free humanity from sin, that he alone had full knowledge of the Father. Christian theology, then, stems not from a sense of general wonderment about the world of things and the Boundless, which probably would not have been very sophisticated in simple fishermen, but rather from the question which Jesus himself put: "Who do you say I am?" That question, perennially with us, was answered in the first century not only by St. Paul but also by the synoptic Evangelists, St. John, and the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, of whose reports Voegelin makes no use. What is more, Voegelin's exegesis of St. Paul would not have to be changed if one removed Jesus Christ from it altogether. Voegelin allows that Paul shows that man is a creature in whom God can incarnate himself. St. Paul, however, reflects on what it means that God did incarnate himself in one particular man at one particular time. His speculations are about the consequences of this "mighty deed" of God, not about the processes of consciousness, which is why general speculations and myths about "Heaven and Earth" are assimilable to Christian dogma, but the reverse is not true.

If Voegelin's chapter on the Pauline Vision of the Resurrected had been adopted as the early Christian theology, the Apostolic Creed might have read: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth: and in St. Paul his prophet, mighty in vision, and in the Spirit of Freedom which he proclaimed." It seems that this once Voegelin has approached a great spiritual reality from a standpoint extraneous to it. Noting that he defines "the Resurrection" as "St. Paul's vision of the Resurrected," we may infer that that standpoint is the same characterized by St. Paul when he saw that the gospel of Jesus Christ must be "a foolishness to the Greeks." If the shoe be fitting, Eric Voegelin would have to concede the application to himself of his own remarks that "critical doubts" about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ "would mean that the critic knows how God has a right to let himself be seen" (243, where the middle part of this sentence reads: "about the vision of the Resurrected").

The reader will be astonished by the title of the following chapter, "The Chinese Ecumene," but may be assured that it is a necessary part of the whole argument. The ecumene, at first an expression for the place of human habitation within its horizon of divine mystery, was deprived of mystery

when conquests and explorations uncovered "an unmysterious geographical expanse." At this point there resulted a conflict with the structure of existence which could be mended only "when the concupiscential associates with a spiritual exodus, when the empire associates with a spiritual movement." (273) This process, which Voegelin has traced in the Near East and the Mediterranean, "is paralleled in China by an equivalent process." Inevitable questions arise: "Are there two mankinds who independently go through the same process? If not, what justifies the language of the one mankind in whose history both the Western and the Eastern Ecumenic Ages occur . . . ?" Voegelin allows for the differences: In the West, a radical break with the cosmological form through Israel and Hellas, giving rise to the "new symbolisms of revelation and philosophy"; in the East this kind of thing "has a habit of never emerging completely." In the West, the drama of mankind is "enacted by a society of societies, in China . . . in a single society," which, moreover, is "singularly devoid of associations with imperial conquest." Still, the fact remains that "the ecumenic ages occur in the plural." (300) The concluding chapter, "Universal Humanity," opens with the provisional formula of an answer to this question. The "differentiations" in consciousness, succeeding each other, "advance man's insight into the constitution of his humanity beyond man's personal existence in society." (304) As the process tends toward a reality beyond the social reality, the "structure of history is eschatological," and history it not a "merely human but a divine-human process." And now he presses toward the conclusion:

> The mankind whose humanity unfolds in the flux of presence is universal mankind. The universality of mankind is constituted by the divine presence in the Metaxy.

As always, Voegelin raises doubts about his own findings. In this case, they are three:

> 1. Why should there be epochs of advancing insight at all? Why is the structure of reality not known in differentiated form at all times?
>
> 2. Why must the insights be discovered by such rare individuals as prophets, philosophers, and saints? Why is not every man the recipient of the insights?
>
> 3. Why when the insights are gained, are they not generally accepted? Why must the epochal truth go through the historical torment of imperfect articulation, evasion, skepticism, disbelief, rejection, deformation, and of renaissances, renovations, rediscoveries, rearticulations, and further differentiations? (316)

These questions, Voegelin tells us, are not to be answered; they "symbolize the mystery in the structure of history by their unanswerability." He calls the symbolism simply "the Question," which is "a structure inherent to the experience of reality." He shows through a series of analyses that the Question is a constant in various modes of experience, raising particular questions in regard to

a) the existence of the cosmos,
b) the hierarchy and diversification of being,
c) the experience of questioning as the constituent of humanity,
d) the leap of existential truth through noetic and pneumatic illuminations of consciousness,
e) the process of history in which the differentiations of questioning consciousness and the leaps in truth occur, and
f) the eschatological movement in the process beyond its structure. (326)

This process, occurring "in the consciousness of concrete human beings in concrete bodies on the concrete earth in the concrete universe" (333) is the drama of mankind. There is no "length of time" in which things happen, there is only "the reality of things which has a time dimension." Simi-

larly, things "do not happen in the astrophysical universe; the universe, together with all things founded in it, happens in God." (334)

How does Voegelin come by his findings? There are two kinds of findings: first the exegeses of thinkers, texts, myths; second the fitting together of these findings in Voegelin's own philosophy. Both are involved in the philosophical structure of linguistic symbols. We remember the experience-question-answer complex which he pointed out as a "constant" of consciousness. Unlike McLuhan, he would say, "the language is the message," but "only when read in the light of the underlying experience." If Voegelin has shed new light even on thinkers whom most people believed they knew well, it is because of his supreme skill in discovering in the texts language symbols that reveal the crucial experiences. Speaking of Aristotle, in his article "Reason: The Classic Experience" (*Southern Review*, Spring, 1974), he groups two clusters of symbols, first those of "restless wondering: "wondering, seeking, searching, search, questioning"; then those of the desire to escape ignorance: "ignorance, flight from ignorance, turning around, knowledge," each with the original Greek term. These he calls the experiential "infra-structure for the noetic insights proper." To identify and understand the insight proper one further requires an analysis of the "movement of consciousness," which in turn demands a thorough knowledge of the background of other philosophers, myths, and external circumstances. It also requires a sensitivity for the theophany. Eventually, then, the analysis progresses to the point where it is possible to formulate findings such as the one in the above quoted article:

> There is both a human and a divine Nous, signifying the human and divine poles of the tension; there is a *noesis* and a *noeton* to signify the poles of the cognitive act intending the ground; and there is generally the verb *noein* to signify the phases of the movement that leads from the questioning unrest to the knowledge of the ground as the Nous.

Thus the new understanding of Plato and Aristotle, Anaximander and Heraclitus, Cicero and Philo, hinges on the special vocabulary of each that Voegelin discovers as their personal creation and the key to their meaning.

In the course of his many years of work, his own philosophy likewise became more articulate through the building of his own vocabulary, of which the following are a few representative examples: *reality, structure of reality, process of reality*—that which is there not by human making, that which men are born into and leave behind when they die, also that from which they have experiences; *primary experience*—the original, unselfconscious experience of the fullness and totality of that reality, before reflection would analytically separate the various aspects, the *primary experience* being adequately represented by the cosmic myth or also such mytho-philosophical statements as Anaximander's; *noetic consciousness*—the consciousness originating in the experience of the *nous* (roughly: the mind) as the divine ground in which men participate through that in them which also has the character of *nous*; *the Metaxy*—Voegelin's noun signifying the in-between situation of "the spirit" and human knowledge, a term derived from Plato where it means at one point "in between divine fullness and human need," and at another "in between the One and the Unlimited"; *exodus*—the movement of both human knowledge and spirit outward and upward, leaving behind "what one has," *i.e.* country, security, formulas of certainty, a symbol coined by St. Augustine's phrase *incipit exire qui incipit amare* (he begins the exodus who begins to love); *differentiate*—a process or refinement, distinction, as well as deepening of man's understanding of reality through which certain aspects become *luminous* that were not so before and which thus has the character of a discovery and

the awareness of the discovery as the process; *tension toward*—a Voegelinian neologism that combines "tension" in the form of unrest, inadequacy, wondering, sense of incongruence with a factor of "direction" which Voegelin sees as the constant "perspective" of consciousness, it being "consciousness of something"; *derailment* —the historical mishap of literalist misinterpretation of language that has meaning only as a symbol of theophanic experience but is eventually read as if it were the description of objects called "the truth." The list is long enough and will have served its purpose, to alert the reader to the same kind of attention to his vocabulary that Voegelin bestows on the materials of past symbolizations.

A brief summarizing assessment of Voegelin's philosophy cannot possibly succeed, first because Voegelin's insights have come through his work on concrete materials of the past rather than through system-building logic, and, second, because now as before Voegelin's mind is still open, his philosophy still deepening and widening, so that he would positively refuse to say: "Here it is; this is my last word." Provisionally, however, one may say the following: As already mentioned a philosophy of consciousness is at the core of his thought. "Consciousness" must not be understood as an idealist or even sensationalist concept. There is a reality apart from the mind and it can be known. Reality is both a structure and a process. It also appears in knowledge as hierarchical, from which stems man's urge to link himself to "more eminent" reality. In the structure of reality there is an everlasting sameness, most emphatically in the "things" and their coming and going. Man, insofar as he, too, is a "thing" remains subject to this sameness. But man, a thing that has consciousness, also participates in reality as a process.

At this point it might appear that Voegelin combines a philosophy of structure with a philosophy of process. The "process" of which he is talking, however, has not the character of evolution or progress, *i.e.* a steady automatic change resulting from impersonal forces. The process is history, and history occurs in and through the changes of human consciousness and the order resulting therefrom. Again, it would be a mistake to confuse this with Marx's dictum: "Men make their own history." History occurs in and by the tension between God and man, through theophanies over the time, place, and character of which men have no control, and through responses by concrete people in concrete cultures, under concrete circumstances. In this sense, while one may speak of one aspect of reality as a process, one must speak of history as a drama. It is dramatic in its key experiences and movements, its strong impressions of "before" and "after," as well as in its occasional "deformations" to the point of a "loss of reality" through the "closing" of the soul to the transcendent divine. Man's existence thus is necessarily historical, but there is no such thing as "history" as a series of pragmatic events strung up on a time line and conceived as that "in which" things happen. History conceived as a whole becomes the new "horizon of divine mystery" replacing the ancient geographic horizon of Okeanos which fell a victim to conquests and explorations. The theophanic events, together with the human responses, constitute history. The drama of mankind occurs in various places, sometimes simultaneously, sometimes independently from each other, as a drama that has a constant structure but a variety of contents, and an overall unity only because it is a human drama under God. As far as reality is concerned, it includes elements of sameness but also man, and thus is "a structure which moves beyond itself." More precisely, however, this movement is represented by St. Paul's insight that "transfiguration is in process in untransfigured history." (302) In other words, there remains a world which becomes intelligible through the question of "the Beginning," in which there occurs a dramatic movement towards "the Beyond." It is obvious that the conventional categories of being, becoming, nature, human

nature, process, epistemology, metaphysics have no application in Voegelin's philosophy. It is philosophy inseparable from history, both the historical past as the genesis of crucial insights and the historical process as the drama of existence; it is also inseparable from the experience of a reality intelligible only through its divine ground; it is inseparable finally from the experience of human participation in the divine through revelation.

A few queries remain. Voegelin has made very good use of the concept of "equivalences," but one wonders also about its inherent dangers. One envisages all experiences, symbolizations, spiritual outbursts, new insights of history lined up in a complete series and surveyed by an even more perfectly encyclopedic Voegelin. In the process of this conceivable survey, where will Veogelin stand? If he were looking at all the moments of "differentiating consciousness" that "constitute history" (332) from where will he look at them? He himself has seen the problem very well:

> To accept the process of differentiation as the exclusive source of knowledge means, negatively, to renounce all pretense to an observer's position outside of the process. Positively, it means to enter the process and to participate both in its formal structure and the concrete tasks imposed on the thinker by his situation in it. (314)

If he "participates in the formal structure of the process" can he do so without participating in the divine ground concretely, through one of the theophanies by which men order their lives? If participating, in which one? If not—can he have a human habitat? He himself disclaims that there is anything like a sum of all truths, or a truth beyond all truths.

The problem becomes more acute when the encyclopedic surveyor of all "equivalents" proceeds to judgment and finds that there has been a "loss of balance," and later a "deformation." The potential task of therapy begins to appear utopian, however, when Voegelin goes further to say: "none of the several eruptions expands the exegesis of the theophanic event into a fully balanced symbolization of order that would cover the whole area of man's existence in society and history." (301) The task here appears as not merely restorative but one of original achievement of what none of the "concrete men in concrete bodies in concrete societies" have achieved. A human being, even when he contemplates millennia, cultures, prophets, philosophers, saints, and the "process" as a whole, must be somewhere, and he can be anywhere only by commitment.

Finally, Voegelin's discovery of the "Ecumenic Age" suggests both a similarity and decisive difference to the age in which we live and which one may call the "Mimetic Age," having many of the problems identified with conquest. I would propose the experience of the Russian Chaadaev (1794-1856) as representative. In 1829, Chaadaev published his first *Philosophical Letter* which complained that Russia, compared with the West, was nothing.

> We have never marched alongside other peoples; we belong to none of the great families of the human race . . . we have not been touched by the universal education of the human race . . . a certain intellectual method, a certain logic is lacking in all of us.

It is an experience that later befell Mustapha Kemal, the father of "modern" Turkey, and Nehru, the leader of India's "modernization." Moved by this experience strong groups within a number of countries set out to import the West and at the same time to deculture their own people, by suppressing its tradition and religion. From the resulting dissociation and confusion, one would expect eventually spiritual outbursts, and indeed we are witnessing the first one, in the prophetic figure of Solzhenitsyn. One would imagine that this Mimetic Age, with its peculiar dislocations and disorientations, might deserve a special chapter in the forthcoming last volume.