

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

THE NOTION OF PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY  
IN THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF ERIC VOEGELIN

by

Mark Anthony Castelino

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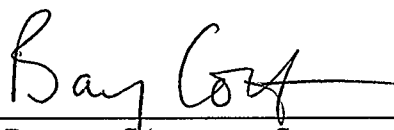
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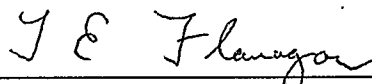
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Dr. Barry Cooper, Supervisor,  
Department of Political Science



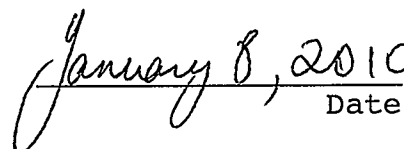
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Dr. Thomas Flanagan  
Department of Political Science



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Dr. Irving Hexham, External  
Department of Religious Studies

  
Date

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of the notion of *philosophical anthropology* in the thought of the political philosopher Eric Voegelin. "Philosophical anthropology" designates a tradition of thinking about the *nature of man* that originates, properly speaking, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but which in a broader sense, in the West, may be understood to extend from the Ancient Greeks to the present day. This essay is concerned particularly with explaining Voegelin's adaptation of the tradition of philosophical anthropology to his own area of specialization, namely, political science. This goal is realised below in three stages: First, an explanation of this tradition as exemplified in the thought of its major representatives in order to demonstrate the salient features therein. Second, Voegelin's own philosophical anthropology is explicated in view of this tradition. In the final part, Voegelin's application of the tradition of philosophical anthropology to the sphere of politics, and his view of the role of the political scientist in this social context, is explained.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Problem

The present thesis proposes to examine the place of philosophical anthropology in the thought of the political philosopher Eric Voegelin (1901-1985). An explication of this notion, taken only in its Voegelinian representation, will not suffice for our purposes, because the subject of philosophical anthropology is in no way peculiar to the thought of Eric Voegelin, but rather designates a tradition of thinking about the *nature of man* (or human being), the roots of which, in the West, date back as far as the Ancient Greeks.<sup>1</sup> This tradition, as we shall see, has had through the centuries many representatives in differing fields of study. Of particular concern for us is Voegelin's motive for adapting the discipline of philosophical anthropology to his own area of specialization, namely, political science, a problem that will be developed over the course of this study.

The relation of philosophical anthropology to political science requires some clarification at the

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<sup>1</sup> We stress the gender-neutral sense of the word "man" as it is employed in this thesis in order to clarify the field of investigation at the outset. For the subject of this essay does not concern either sex of the human being, but the latter considered as such, without regard to gender. The material discussed below thus applies to both the male and female sexes equally, in principle, and does not pertain to nor address sexual difference but the unity of the human being and its nature.

outset, lest we should set ourselves adrift from our political moorings. To aid in our efforts, we may pose ourselves the question: what has the nature of man to do with the subject-matter of politics? For Voegelin, certainly, a philosophy of politics demands that an idea of man be comprehensively developed by him who would formulate a theory of politics. Indeed, since political science has come to designate that discipline which studies social order as it exists in human intercourse within the bounds of the territorial limits of a sovereign states, and because this political unit is constituted by concrete human beings, a clear *idea of man* is, according to Voegelin, a *sine qua non* of a theory of politics. This concern is reflected, for example, in a review that Voegelin wrote in 1942 of H. Cairns' *Theory of Legal Science*, where Voegelin says that, in order to discuss human activities in any social order, a "philosophy of man and his place in society and the world at large" is necessary, for without an "idea of man, we have no frame of reference for the designation of human phenomena as relevant or irrelevant."<sup>2</sup> However, in reality, man does not exist *in abstracto*, but is "engaged in the creation of

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<sup>2</sup> Eric Voegelin, "The Theory of Legal Science: A Review," in *The Nature of the Law and Related Legal Writings*, in R. A. Pascal, J.L. Babin, and J.W. Corrington, eds., *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin (CW)*, Vol. 27 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 101.

social order physically, biologically, psychologically, intellectually, and spiritually."<sup>3</sup>

The question of relevance thus has much to do with Voegelin's use of philosophical anthropology in his approach to politics: if politics, as Aristotle said, constitutes a "social activity," indeed the most significant such activity of man, since it deals with that association of men that aims at the highest common good for human beings<sup>4</sup>, how would a theory of politics be able to relate to this *koinonia* of men if it did not have a clear conception of its constituents — fundamentally of man himself and his nature?

Indeed, a conception of "man" figures prominently in the political thought of both the "ancients" and the "moderns." The great political philosophers, including Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau, and Marx, each have a distinct idea of human nature that bears significantly on their political thought: the opportunistic Machiavellian Prince as well as Hobbes' selfish "natural man" engaged in a "war of all against all" both constitute ideas of *man*, which, though only roughly sketched here, in fact underpin, to a large degree, a particular philosophy of politics. In this regard we may say, with Voegelin, that

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252a1.



[t]he great systems of social thought have different rules of relevance because they have different anthropologies. The anthropology of Aristotle is not that of Plato, the Machiavellian is not the Thomistic, the Bodinian not the Hobbesian, and so forth; and the systems of these thinkers are at variance with each other less because of disagreement about facts than because of disagreement about anthropological principles.<sup>5</sup>

Voegelin's political thought is similarly based on a particular idea of man. However, as we shall see, Voegelin's idea of man is rather more complex than that of most others, for it is rooted explicitly in his reading of the tradition of philosophical anthropology, a tradition that arguably extends from the ancient Greeks up to the present day. The discussion of Voegelin's interpretation will comprise the first part of the thesis. By so doing, we seek not only to furnish an exposé of Voegelin's conception of philosophical anthropology, but also to demonstrate how his conception of man relates to his own political thought.

## Method

Having stated at the start that "philosophical anthropology" comprises a tradition of thinking about man, we begin by providing an explanation of this tradition and its aims, as well as providing a brief account of the

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<sup>5</sup> Voegelin, "The Theory of Legal Science: A Review," 103.

thought of its main representatives, as it is related to Voegelin's thought. To do so, we survey the primary historical representatives of philosophical anthropology who most influenced Voegelin himself.

The second part is devoted to an explanation of Voegelin's philosophical anthropology. It is divided into two sections: first, a discussion of Voegelin's philosophy of consciousness, which lies at the heart of his political philosophy and his idea of man; the second section of this part takes up Voegelin's conception of history and the relation of it to his philosophy of politics and to his idea of man.

The third and final part draws together the themes from the preceding two parts to explain Voegelin's political philosophy in its application to socio-political order, and is divided into two sections. First, Voegelin's notion of the "tension" of man to the ground of his being will be explained and its relation to politics discussed. The second section is an analysis of two concrete examples of Voegelin's application of his philosophical anthropology to political phenomena and his conception of the role of the political scientist in political society.

## **PART 1: What is Philosophical Anthropology?**

The objective of this first part is to furnish an explanation of the notion of philosophical anthropology and its bearing on Voegelin's thought *qua* approach to political reality. A fully comprehensive exposition of this notion will thus not be attempted here; rather, only the basic elements of philosophical anthropology will be discussed, and particularly its pertinence to Voegelin's understanding of political reality. This objective will be achieved first by analysing those philosophical anthropologies that most influenced Voegelin's thought, *i.e.*, the Greek and the Christian. In the second section of this part, modern philosophical anthropologies will be taken up along with Husserl's phenomenology and its relation to Voegelin's political philosophy.

### **1.1 Traditional Philosophical Anthropologies.**

As M. Landmann notes, the term "philosophical anthropology" implies that other kinds of anthropology exist. Notably, the title "anthropology" has been the term designated by the natural sciences to connote the study of man by means of "empirical" methods, *i.e.*, those which aim

to grasp their object of study by its sensorily verifiable traits. Thus, an understanding of the human being based on his descent from primate life forms would fall into such an anthropology.<sup>6</sup>

*Philosophical* anthropology, however, seeks to find a wholly different basis according to which the human being is to be understood as such. In this tradition, M. Scheler defines philosophical anthropology as

a basic science which investigates the *essence* and the *essential constitution* of man, his relationship to the realm of nature (organic, plant, and animal life) as well as to the source of all things, man's metaphysical origin as well as his physical, psychic, and spiritual origins in the world, the forces and powers which move man and which he moves, the fundamental trends and laws of his biological, psychic, cultural, and social evolution, along with their essential capabilities and realities.<sup>7</sup>

In this passage several of the characteristics that may be said to define philosophical anthropology appear and will be discussed more fully below. For the moment, however, it may be noted that according to Scheler the central concern of the discipline is that it investigates the *essence* of man. Philosophical anthropology is thus a "basic science" in that it seeks to determine what man *is* most fundamentally, and further, considered not merely in

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Landmann, *Philosophical Anthropology*, tr. David J. Parent (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), 17.

<sup>7</sup> Max Scheler, *Philosophical Perspectives*, tr. Oscar A. Haac (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 65.

himself but also in relation to the natural world and to his ultimate origins and destiny.

Philosophical anthropology may thus be considered in terms of man's need to *interpret himself*. It is in this sense that A. Gehlen has stated that

[t]he need felt by reflective persons for an interpretation of human existence is not simply a theoretical need. Depending on the decisions that such an interpretation entails, certain concerns become evident while others are concealed. Whether man sees himself as a creature of God or as a highly evolved ape will make a distinctive difference in his attitude toward concrete facts; in each case as well, he will respond to very different inner callings.<sup>8</sup>

Human self-interpretation is not merely a theoretical occupation, for the way according to which man understands himself in relation to the natural world and to his own origins has an important influence on his conduct. For this reason, Gehlen draws attention to the "need for self-explanation, for which an 'image,' an interpretive formula, is necessary."<sup>9</sup>

Such an "image" of man has not been historically immutable. As mentioned, because a general historical survey of philosophical anthropology is beyond the objective of the present study, the present discussion on philosophical anthropology is focussed on Voegelin's

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<sup>8</sup> Arnold Gehlen, *Man: His Nature and Place in the World*, tr. Clare McMillan and Karl Pillemer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

philosophical concerns and occupations. We begin, therefore, with the idea of man held by the Greeks, particularly Plato and Aristotle.

#### 1.1.1 The Greek Idea of Man

Both Plato and Aristotle decisively influenced the development of Voegelin's own philosophical anthropology, as we argue more directly in the subsequent parts of this thesis. Central to the Greek philosophical anthropology, or idea of man, is the notion of the human soul (*psyche*), within whose order reason (*logos*) holds the highest and determining position.

The first thinker to formulate a complete and coherent image of man was Plato. The Platonist conception of man is based most fundamentally on the duality of body and soul, which are held by him to be constitutive of the individual person. These two basic parts of man do not, of course, exist such that each one is independent of the other; rather, the soul commands the body, and this not merely in terms of its movement. For Plato the *nature* of the soul obliges a plurality of modes by which it might stand in relation to the body, and indeed, how much control it may exert over it.

According to Plato's famous account of the tripartite soul in the *Republic*, the latter consists of appetitive, spirited, and rational elements.<sup>10</sup> The individual's soul ought to be ruled by the rational part, because it is this part which disposes of the use of reason, which must control the other parts of his soul. Hence for Plato, the health of the soul is of paramount importance; the three parts of the soul must be balanced one with another in such a manner that the rational part predominates, "since it is wise and has forethought about the rest of the soul, and for the spirited part to be obedient to it and its ally."<sup>11</sup>

Plato's paradigmatic political community as set forth in his *Republic* reflects the tripartite structure of the human soul; indeed, Plato's "beautiful city" (*kallipolis*) represents the human soul writ large in that the individual inhabitants take up the roles and pursue the activities that correspond to the parts of the soul. In this way, Plato's psychology of the human being would find its extrapolation and realization in the actual political reality that for the Greeks constitutes the *polis*. Thus there may be seen in Plato a close connection between the study of the political community and that of the individual *psyche*. Indeed, the individual *consciousness* in Voegelin's

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<sup>10</sup> Plato, *Republic*, tr. A. Bloom (Basic Books, 1968), 114ff. (436a).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 121 (441e).

view, as will be shown further on, ought to be understood in relation to the concrete political reality in which that individual finds himself. In this way, the above considerations of Plato's view of man in the *Republic* may be seen, as Voegelin does, in terms of a "rudimentary philosophical anthropology"; i.e. a certain way of conceiving of man in terms of his eternal, essential qualities in the context of political society, and thus a theory concerning the relation between the order of man and the order of society.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, Aristotle's political thought is impregnated with a particular political anthropology. We may begin with his famous expression: "man is a political animal, in a sense in which a bee is not, or any other gregarious animal", because nature "does nothing without some purpose; and she has endowed man alone among the animals with the power of speech (*logos*)."<sup>13</sup> Two things may be noted in this passage.

The first is Aristotle's method of first determining what is peculiar to the specifically human political community. Aristotle, here as elsewhere in his writings, picks out particular characteristics that are proper to the

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<sup>12</sup> Voegelin, *Order and History*, Vol. 3: *Plato and Aristotle*, in D. Germino, ed., *CW*, Vol. 16 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 139.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics*, tr. T.A. Sinclair (London: Penguin, 1962), 69 (1253a7).



human being and that distinguish him from the animals. This is, as will become apparent in this chapter, a running theme throughout the tradition of philosophical anthropology; indeed, by virtue of this fact alone, Aristotle might rightly be considered a part of this same tradition.

Secondly, speech, according to Aristotle, makes possible the fulfilment of activities necessary to life in the political community (*polis*). Speech

serves to indicate what is good and what is harmful, and so also what is just and what is unjust. For the real difference between man and other animals is that humans alone have perception of good and evil, just and unjust, etc. It is the sharing of a common view in these matters that makes a household and a state.<sup>14</sup>

From this passage it is evident that speech, on Aristotle's view, makes possible the *moral* underpinnings of a political community; not only are judgements in this regard made possible by it on the part of individuals but also their communication to others and concordance with them.

At the beginning of the *Metaphysics* as well, an image of man as distinct from the animals emerges, having also to do with man's rational capacity: "All men by nature desire understanding." By contrast, "[a]ll animals, except men, live with the aid of appearances and memory, and they

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

participate but little in experience; but the race of men lives also by art [*techne*] and judgement [*logismos*]."<sup>15</sup>

Thus, according to Aristotle the trait that distinguishes man from the animals is his capacity of reasoning and his ability to communicate his thoughts to others in political society. We may summarize the Greek view of man as held by Plato and Aristotle as being centred around man's innate rationality; thus man's reason (*logos*) emerges in Greek thought as the *sine qua non* of life in political society, a theme that reverberates throughout the history of political anthropology and finds, as will be seen, a central place in Voegelin's own thought.

### 1.1.2 The Christian Idea of Man

The other major strand of philosophical anthropology to influence Voegelin's thought is the Christian tradition.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps most fundamentally, the particular idea of man held by this tradition is symbolized by the account of man's origins: man was created by God in his own image. Man thus does not exist in a state of complete abandonment: owing to his divine origin, man participates in the cosmic

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<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, tr. H. G. Apostle (Grinnell, Iowa: The Peripatetic Press, 1979), 12 (980b).

<sup>16</sup> It must be stressed that the following exposition of the Christian idea of man in no way claims to be comprehensive: as stated in the introduction, our account of this subject has been set forth primarily in order to clarify the Voegelinian philosophical anthropology, and not as a complete exposition of the Christian conception of human being.

order of which he is a part in a way that the animals do not and cannot. As the theologian W. Pannenberg has said, man's special place in the cosmos is determined by his "individual, immortal soul," which "was conceived, not as simply a participation in a world soul that permeates the cosmos, but [...] as a supraterrrestrial distinguishing mark and dignity that elevates humanity above that entire cosmos and sets it at God's side over against the cosmos."<sup>17</sup> The Christian view of man thus affirms the separation of humanity from the animal kingdom, as Aristotle had argued earlier. However, in the context of Christian belief, this distinguishing mark is not chiefly man's *logos* but his divine origin and the relation of man to his creator.

The relationship between man and God was famously expressed by Augustine in the opening lines of his *Confessions*:

You are great, Lord, and most worthy of praise. Great is your virtue and your wisdom is without measure. And man seeks to praise you; some small part of your creation, man bears his mortality and is witness to his sins, he bears witness that you oppose his arrogance; and yet man, some small part of your creation, seeks to praise you. You rouse us to praise you with delight, because you bring us towards you and restless is our heart until it rests in you.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, tr. Matthew J. O'Connell (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), 27.

<sup>18</sup> Augustine, *Confessiones*, in "The Confessions of Augustine: An Electronic Edition," ed. J.J. O'Donnell, <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/conf/frames1.html> (accessed July 24, 2009). This and subsequent translations from the Latin are my own. The original reads:

Several themes important in the Christian idea of man may be recognized in this passage, themes that also emerge in the thought of Voegelin, as will be seen further on.

The first such theme to note is the relation of man (here, the particular man, namely Augustine himself) to God *qua* relation of creation to creator. Here we find an instance of Christian philosophical anthropology according to which man, although he finds himself immediately alone on earth, invokes, or rather has the capacity to invoke, God, the infinitely powerful and omniscient divine entity who is the very reason for his existence. Furthermore, this passage indicates that, according to Christian belief, man does not exist on earth with a licence to act capriciously, but rather exists within an absolute bounds marked out by a determinate morality, and that moreover God bears witness to man's sins or transgressions. Man is dependant upon God, who bears witness to his arrogance when he rejects his place in the relationship with his creator. Thirdly, man's condition on earth leaves him "restless" (*inquietum*) and so he exists in a certain state of *tension*. There is movement implied in Augustine's words: man would seek to move

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"magnus es, domine, et laudabilis valde. magna virtus tua et sapientiae tuae non est numerus. et laudare te vult homo, aliqua portio creaturae tuae, et homo circumferens mortalitatem suam, circumferens testimonium peccati sui et testimonium quia superbis resistis; et tamen laudare te vult homo, aliqua portio creaturae tuae. tu excitas ut laudare te delectet, quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te."

towards God (*ad te*), but this situation demands of man that he be open to God's call. In the second and third parts of this thesis, these themes will be seen to recur in Voegelin's philosophical anthropology.

Perhaps the most important political philosopher, and indeed the most important Christian theologian, of the Middle Ages was Thomas Aquinas, who, like Augustine, had a particular view of man and whose thought came to bear the greatest influence on the Catholic Church. His idea of man, heavily influenced by Aristotle, is expressed most comprehensively in his major work, the massive *Summa Theologica*, each part of which is structured by the author's responses to a series of questions. One section of the work (Questions 75-89) deals with the nature of man, and in particular that of the soul (*anima*) in relation to the body (*corpus*): "I say that the soul is the first principle of life" because our souls "are that which lives in us."<sup>19</sup> It is the soul that bequeaths directly unto man his life, even though God is the final cause, *i.e.* the origin, of all that exists.<sup>20</sup> But this raises the question

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Vol. 1 (Rome: Forzani, 1894), 551: "*anima dicitur esse primum principium vitae in his, quae apud nos vivunt.*" (Quaestio LXXV, Articulus I.)

<sup>20</sup> Indeed, such a role for the soul vis-à-vis the body may be seen in these lines: "*Quod autem est actu tale, habet hoc ad aliquo principio, quod dicitur actus ejus. Anima igitur quae est primum principium vitae, non est corpus, sed corporis actus.*" (*Ibid.*)

of what separates man from the animals, who are also God's creations.

Aquinas responds, following Aristotle, by remarking on the "sensory souls" (*sensitiva anima*) of animals: "And so it is clear that because the sensory soul does not have any peculiar operation on its own, but all operations of the sensory soul are in conjunction [with the body]. From this it follows that since the souls of brute animals (*animae brutorum animalium*) do not carry out the operations on their own they are not subsistent", whereas the soul of man is.<sup>21</sup> The matter of the subsistence of the soul, i.e. its survival upon the death of the body, is, of course, of great significance for the Christian image of man, for it is by virtue of man's cosmic status *qua* divine creation that the human soul is held to be immortal, a trait that distinguishes him from the animals.

To close our exposition of the Christian anthropology, a further remark should be made. The conception of man that is prevalent in Christianity, including in its exemplification in Augustine and Aquinas, is first and foremost rooted in religious *faith*. The Christian idea of man may be seen to represent, as Scheler says, "a very complex result of religious Judaism and its testimonials, especially the Old Testament, the religious histories of

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 554. (Quaestio LXXV, Articulus III.)

antiquity, and the Gospels."<sup>22</sup> Here we find an image of man that is of course not a product of the natural sciences but rather is one that has developed out of the *myths* that lie at the foundation of Christian belief. These include "the creation of man (in body and soul) by a personal God, man's descent from a first couple, his stay in Paradise [...] salvation through the God-man", etc.<sup>23</sup>

An attempt has been made, as we have seen in Aristotle and Aquinas, to render more precisely the nature of man by contrasting it with that of animal life. In the next section of this essay, this tendency will be seen to recur in modern philosophical anthropology: by finding what is peculiar to man with respect to the deficiencies of the animals, an immutable essence of man could be discovered, but with further gradations than that of the dualism between body and soul.

## 1.2 Modern Philosophical Anthropology

The principle themes that have emerged in the preceding pages on the *special place of man* in relation to the animals, in particular his rationality for the Greeks and his belief in God as the creator of man on the

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<sup>22</sup> Scheler, *Philosophical Perspectives*, 69.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-70.

Christian view, emerge in the philosophical anthropology of the twentieth century, albeit in a somewhat different form.

There are three major representatives of philosophical anthropology in the twentieth century: Max Scheler, Arnold Gehlen, and Helmuth Plessner, although others, such as Adolf Portmann, have also contributed significantly. Of course, this is not the place for a comprehensive exposition of these thinkers, whose individual work is much richer than the following cursory exposition can afford to document. Nevertheless, below we shall draw attention to a particular trait of modern philosophical anthropology: in addition to an accentuation of the differences between man and animals, 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophical anthropology also emphasizes the distinction between man and his *environment*, in comparison to the way animals relate to their environment.

#### 1.2.1 Man and his Environment

This tendency is particularly evident in the work of Portmann, a zoologist by training. Noting the tendency of certain political leaders who would justify human behavior by analogy to that of animals, he states that "the human lacks the sureness of instinctive judgement; it lacks the unexceptionally matter-of-fact behavior that goes with



preservation of the species."<sup>24</sup> Consequently, "it is a grave error to believe that the basis for evaluating human existence can be found with certainty by studying animal behavior"; while the biologist can make contributions by providing "the basis for important comparisons," these, which make "our particularity stand out more clearly," are merely "part of the effort to find [...] the laws according to which we lead our lives."<sup>25</sup> Gehlen, similarly, stresses the lack of instinctive "guides" that the animals dispose of for the sake of their survival. Man is a "deficient being and is for this reason world-open; in other words, his survival is not strictly dependant upon a specific environment."<sup>26</sup> The notion of "world-openness" (originally Scheler's idea) and its relation to the specifically human constitution and in contradistinction to animal life is shared by the thinkers named above, though each has drawn somewhat different conclusions from this distinction concerning the uniquely human constitution.

According to Portmann, the behavior of animals can be described as "[c]onstrained by environment and protected by instinct [...]. In contrast, human behavior may be termed

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<sup>24</sup> Adolf Portmann, *A Biologist Looks at Humankind*, tr. Judith Schaeffer (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1990), 16.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Gehlen, *Man: His Nature and Place in the World*, 27-28.

open to the world and possessed of freedom of choice."<sup>27</sup> The "openness" of man to his environment can be seen as a particular emphasis of certain twentieth-century biologists who have sought to compare animal life to that of humans; the German biologist J. von Uexküll has similarly noted that man is not "tied" to his "world" in the way that animals are to theirs.<sup>28</sup>

The relative lack of dependency on instincts results in man's unique position with respect to his environment in comparison with the animals; he is not born prepared for life in the world as are the animals. Thus, from the point of view of biology and zoology, we may say that, for Portmann as for philosophical anthropology generally speaking, the being of man is *not reducible to biological factors* as is that of the animal; man is not governed by instinct. We have seen that Portmann does not attempt to determine the nature of man as opposed to animals by looking at man merely as he is in himself, but rather by examining man in relation to his *environment*.

This can be seen in the work of Helmuth Plessner, according to whom all living things are "organised" in one

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<sup>27</sup> Portman, *A Biologist*, 79.

<sup>28</sup> Jacob von Uexküll, *Mondes animaux et monde humain*, Fr. tr. Phillipe Müller (Paris: Denoël, 1984 [1965]), 24. Uexküll goes so far, in ascribing a determinant role to environmental influence in the case of animals, as to say: "*L'instinct n'est que le signe de notre embarras et l'on n'y a recours que si l'on nie les plans naturels surindividuels.*" (57).

of three ways in respect to the surrounding world, a relation that he calls their "positionality" (*Positionalität*).<sup>29</sup> There are for him three types of life form: plant, animal, and human, each of which corresponds to a type of positionality. According to this schema, plants are "open" (*offen*) with respect to their environment as they are directly connected to and dependant upon it.<sup>30</sup> In like manner, the animal is "centric" (*zentrisch*), for it lives in a "here-and-now" with respect to its environment and its own body; even when it relates itself to its past experiences, it lives directly in the present.<sup>31</sup>

The positionality of man, however, is very different. His characteristic element is his "excentricity" (*Exkentrizität*) against his environment. Man "experiences the bond in the absolute Here-and-Now, the total convergence of environment and own body against the focal point of his position and is for that reason no longer bound by it," unlike plants and animals, who are tied to the environment to which they are habituated, whether by genetic adaptation or otherwise.<sup>32</sup> Man, by virtue of his *liberum arbitrium* and his self-consciousness, takes a

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<sup>29</sup> Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975 [1928]), 129. This and all subsequent translations from the German are my own unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 239-40, 279.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 291. "Er erlebt die Bindung im absoluten Hier-Jetzt, die Totalkonvergenz des Umfeldes und des eigenen Leibes gegen das Zentrum seiner Position und ist darum nicht mehr von ihr gebunden."

fundamentally different stance toward his environment than do other life-forms; man, aware of his position in the world in relation to, and contrary to, the animals, "not only lives and experiences, but he experiences his experience."<sup>33</sup>

Certain themes in Plessner recur in the thought of Gehlen, who has been cited previously here but not treated in relation to the two other major philosophical anthropologists of the twentieth century. Gehlen's may be seen as guided by the question evoked at the start of the present work: "[w]hat does man's need to interpret his existence mean?"<sup>34</sup> This is for Gehlen the central problem of philosophical anthropology, that humans beings have always sought in some way or other to understand human existence, i.e. the why and wherefore of it. We have already touched on the two major forms of such an interpretation, that is, religion and science (more specifically, evolutionary theory). The first of these holds that man is a creation of God, the other, that he is a highly evolved ape. Gehlen points out, however, that it is difficult to interpret man exclusively from himself. Thus both the above interpretations, while seemingly wholly antithetical, "share one thing in common — that man cannot be understood

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 292. "Er lebt und erlebt nicht nur, sondern er erlebt sein Erleben."

<sup>34</sup> Gehlen, *Man: His Nature and Place in the World*, 4.

in and of himself but that it is necessary to employ categories above and beyond man in order to describe and explain him," which in these cases are respectively God and the process of biological evolution.<sup>35</sup>

Gehlen, however, contends that such assumptions are not necessary; rather, "it is possible to develop an understanding of man's nature that would make use of very specific concepts, applicable to the subject of man."<sup>36</sup> So the question arises of what is intrinsic to man that distinguishes him from other beings, *i.e.* of what distinguishes specifically *human* being from other beings. What is there about man that is *uniquely* human?

As we saw, it has been previously postulated by the Greeks and by Christian thought that the essential constitution of man consists in a mind-body duality; on this view man would be a unity of body and soul, with the mind partaking in communion with a higher, incorporeal entity (*e.g.* Aristotle's *nous* or the Christian God). Gehlen, however, rejects such a dualism: such a procedure "does not actually overcome the dualism of body and soul, of the 'external' and 'internal.'"<sup>37</sup> A dualistic conception of man would seem to entail the enumeration of individual

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

characteristics and, more importantly, does not explain the uniqueness of man (do animals not also have souls in the sense of an "inner" life?). Nor does it explain why it occurred "to Nature to fashion a being who, by reason of his consciousness, so often falls prey to error and disturbance? Why, instead of 'soul' and 'mind', did she not supply him with a few unerring instincts?"<sup>38</sup>

Gehlen's image of man as a *Mängelwesen* (deficient being) owing to his lack of instinctive guides prompts him to develop a positive conception of man centred on this very lack. Drawing on Nietzsche's notion of man as the "not yet determined animal," Gehlen puts forward the view that man is "not firmly established," which means that "he draws upon his own aptitudes and talents to survive; of necessity, he relates to himself in a way that no animal does. I would say that man does not so much *live* as *lead* his life. He does this not for reasons of enjoyment, but out of sheer desperation."<sup>39</sup>

Thus for Gehlen, man, deprived of the instincts that enable animals to survive in and adapt to their environment, lives under a great burden, whence comes the need of man to seek "relief" from his daily stresses. Man's lack of instinctive determinants shows that he is

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

fundamentally "world-open," which means that "he foregoes an animal adaptation to a specific environment."<sup>40</sup> This idea, according to which man distinguishes himself from animals by virtue of his lack of attachment to a particular environment for his survival, is the idea which we saw earlier in Portmann and Plessner. Thus the three thinkers discussed thus far all draw attention to a lack of reliance on instinctual environmental adaptation, which is called here by Gehlen man's "world-openness." As noted, this phrase originally comes from Max Scheler, the philosophical anthropologist who primarily influenced Voegelin and to whom we now turn.

### 1.2.2 Scheler

Scheler's main contribution to the tradition of philosophical anthropology, and the work that most influenced Voegelin, is called *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*.<sup>41</sup> The main objective of the work is to determine

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>41</sup> Scheler, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*, (Bonn: Bouvier, 2007 [1928]). The standard English translation is *Man's Place in Nature*, tr. Hans Meyerhoff (Boston: Beacon, 1961). However, we have not made any recourse to this translation, nor to any other. Furthermore, as we shall see in the second part, the *cosmological* connotation that the original German title indicates is of significance in the context of Voegelin's thought. We shall see that Scheler's understanding of "cosmos" may well be demonstrative of the considerable influence that Voegelin drew from Scheler in terms of his own philosophical anthropology. In particular, it is the *metaphysical* element that is decisive in Scheler's philosophical anthropology, and which probably accounts most for Scheler's influence on Voegelin.

"the essence of man in relation to plants, animals, and further, the metaphysical special place of man."<sup>42</sup> In order to achieve this objective (and this is important in terms of Scheler's method), man is not approached primarily according to his biological or "natural" traits, but rather the investigation is an attempt to determine the *essence* (*das Wesen*) of man, i.e., the element in him that is eternal and immutable and that is sufficient to distinguish him from other forms of life. Scheler, as the other thinkers in this tradition we have surveyed, looks for that which is peculiar to man and that which distinguishes him from other forms of life. However, the *method* he employs to find the solution to this question is different from other philosophical anthropologists. This method is marked by the very object of inquiry: the "essence" of man, referred to earlier, which is the primary characteristic of Scheler's *phenomenological* approach to the discipline.<sup>43</sup>

The essence of man and hence his "special place" is *initially* to be understood in terms of the "comprehensive structure of the bio-physical world," which is ordered according to "physical powers and capabilities (*physichen*

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>43</sup> The subject of phenomenology and its relation to Voegelin's thought will be discussed at section 1.2.3; for the moment it can be stated merely that phenomenology aims at the "essences" of concrete things, meaning their subjective meaning for the external observer. Hence Scheler's attention to subjectivity as per his method.



*Kräfte und Fähigkeiten*)."<sup>44</sup> This aspect of living beings is, however, merely the *phenomenal* one, an aspect that shows itself in a sensible mode to the observer, in this case the analyst who seeks to understand the object in question. But aside from the "objective" properties of the phenomena that one encounters and attributes to "living beings" (such as movement, growth, response to stimuli, etc.), "[l]iving beings are not only objects for external observers, but also have a for-itself and inner being, in which they themselves become inner to themselves, an essential characteristic of them"; this inner, subjective side of the phenomena that reveal themselves to the observer's senses Scheler calls the "primordial psychic phenomenon of life (*das psychische Urphänomen des Lebens*)."<sup>45</sup> The broader domain in which Scheler's anthropology operates, namely *individual experience*, is thus much broader than that of the natural sciences.

The citation above indicates that for Scheler, the "psychic sphere" governs all life forms, but according to a graduated scale, the constitutive levels of which are (1) life-urge (*Gefühlsdrang*); (2) instinct (*Instinkt*); (3)

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 11

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 12. "*Lebewesen nicht nur Gegenstände für äußere Beobachter sind, sondern auch ein Fürsich und Innesein besitzen, in dem sie sich selber inne werden, ein für sie wesentliches Merkmal*". Scheler's approach owes much to the thinker who is probably his main influence: the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, the relation of whose thought to Voegelin will be addressed in section 1.2.3 of this thesis.

associative thought (*assoziatives Gedächtnis*); and (4) practical intelligence (*praktische Intelligenz*). These apply to all forms of organic life, whether it be plant, animal, or human. However, not all forms of life dispose of all these traits. Plants, for instance, have for their distinguishing phenomenal characteristic only the first: a blind, unconscious pressing forth in a given environment. Thus, "the essential direction of life, that the 'plant' or 'vegetative' being designates [...] is an urge that is wholly directed towards the outside [world]." <sup>46</sup> Hence, "urge" or "impulse" (*Drang*) is the living characteristic of plants, because they, while certainly forms of life, do not seem to possess the interiority or subjective inner being (*Innesein*) that the other forms of life do. Thus, the more pressing question for Scheler concerns the essential distinction between animals and humans.

The second "*seelische Wesensform*" described by Scheler is that which is customarily called "instinct". This notion, since it is a "very controversial and obscure" psychological definition, Scheler wishes to avoid. Instead, to refers to the behavior (*Verhalten*) of the being in question, because the behavior "of a living being is always the object of external observation and possible description," and further, "any behaviour is always the

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

expression of an inner state; for there is no inner-spiritual state (*Innerseelisches*) that does not 'express' itself, directly or indirectly, in behaviour."<sup>47</sup> In conformity with his method, which assumes an adequate correspondence of externally manifest behavior with a living organism's "inner," i.e. mental or spiritual, state, Scheler effectuates a movement from the externally observable appearance to the presumed inner state, in the case of animal life. This recourse to behavior to infer the spiritual state, in the case of animals, who cannot otherwise communicate it, Scheler shares with the biologists Uexküll and Portmann, as we have seen above.

Animal life is distinguished from that of plants by "instinctive" behavior, but more specifically, instinct connotes a certain "directionality" with respect to the animal's environment. It is driven forth, pushed along by instinct, acting in accordance with and not against it. Like this second psychic characteristic, the last two, i.e. "associative thoughts" and "intelligence", are exclusive to animals and humans, as plants and "lower" animals do not manifest evidence of these characteristics, as do, e.g., a dog responding to commands or a chimpanzee solving math problems. Such phenomena constitute manifestations of an "inner" state, which might even be analogous to a soul. Yet

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

we have not yet arrived at the cardinal distinction between man and animal, which is the object of Scheler's investigation: to decisively determine the "special place" of man in contrast to all other life forms. Even a category such as "intelligence" will not suffice, for then Scheler would fall into the trap of relying on a "graduated scale" of intelligence to mark out man from the animals. Hence Scheler's example: there would be "between a clever chimpanzee and Edison, if this latter were understood merely as a technician, only a — albeit very great — *graduated distinction*."<sup>48</sup> We would come back to the question of whether man is but a very highly evolved ape (a question also raised by Gehlen, as we saw); thus the category of intelligence does not in and of itself settle the issue.

Hence Scheler must find another concept as the defining characteristic of man: it might be reason (*Vernunft*), *i.e.*, the fact that man looks for the cause or reason for a given phenomenon, that distinguishes him from the animals; we recall that this was proposed by Aristotle as the distinctively human trait. But Scheler seeks a more comprehensive word (*ein umfassenderes Wort*) to characterise man; this word is "*Geist*" (spirit).<sup>49</sup> Man may be said to distinguish himself from all other forms of life by his

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 41n.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 41, 42.

"spirit". But what does this mean and, more importantly, what does it entail in a social context?

Scheler understands the term "spirit" as "*Weltoffenheit*" (world-openness), as we have already mentioned in our discussion of Gehlen, who borrows this notion from Scheler. Man, for Scheler as well, bears a markedly different relation to the natural world than does the animal. The latter is more or less bound to its environment, that is, it relates itself to what it is given, which it must handle, and resist if necessary, so that it will fulfil its "instinctual" drives. Man, on the contrary, has "spirit": he is self-consciousness and need not conform his behavior to his drives: he can conceive freely the manner by which he wishes to act; he thus can accordingly inhibit or permit satisfaction of his drives as he chooses.<sup>50</sup>

Thus Scheler says: "Compared to the animal, that always says 'Yes' to its reality (*Wirklichsein*), [...] man is he who can say No (*der Neinsagenkönner*), the 'ascetic of life'".<sup>51</sup> Scheler's idea of man as the being who is able to say "No" to his natural impulses can be seen in the cardinal *opposition* that the philosopher sets up to characterise man. Fundamentally, it is *not*, as we found in

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

Greek and Christian thought, that between body and soul. Rather, Scheler's opposition is between *spirit* and *life*.<sup>52</sup> Man is not compelled by instinct to yield to his drives; he can, indeed, *must* determine himself in relation to his environment. This is because man, unlike other living beings, is able to *objectify himself*: only he "is able to swing himself above himself (*sich emporschwingen*), and from a focal point as it were beyond the spatiotemporal world, from *everything*, including himself, to make [himself] an object of his understanding."<sup>53</sup> Such, according to Scheler, is the position of man in relation to himself and to his environment.

Man's relationship to his environment, unique among living beings, is reflected in the four levels of being that make up his constitution: (1) inorganic (*anorganisch*); (2) living (*qua Lebewesen*); (3) animal (*tierisch*); (4) human (*menschlich*). The being of man is thus understood as a series of interrelated modes of being; this series is not a "jumble", but a determinate order according to which man exists and lives (or, as Gehlen says, *leads*) his life. This

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 89. "Nicht also Leib und Seele oder Körper und Seele oder Gehirn und Seele im Menschen sind es. Der Gegensatz, den wir im Menschen antreffen und der auch subjektiv als solcher gelebt wird, ist von viel höherer und tiefergreifender Ordnung: es ist der Gegensatz von Geist und Leben."

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 52. Man "vermag sich über sich – als Lebewesen – emporzuschwingen und von einem Zentrum gleichsam jenseits der raumzeitlichen Welt aus alles, darunter auch sich selbst, zum Gegenstande seiner Erkenntnis zu machen."

series of modes of being may, in the case of man (but not that of the animals), be extended further: man not only bears within himself these variegated relationships to the natural world, but also a special connection to its *beyond*.

Man, in his unique situation in the world, says Scheler, is susceptible to inquire: "'So where do I stand myself? What is my place?' He can no longer really say 'I am a part of the world, I am enclosed by it (*von ihr umgeschlossen*).'"<sup>54</sup> The reason for this is that he knows he is able to hold himself at a distance from the world and reflect upon its — and his own — very being. Whence it may come to pass that this individual would wonder, in the manner of the German philosopher G.W. Leibniz: instead of absolute nothingness, "'[w]hy is there a world at all, why and how am 'I' at all?'"<sup>55</sup> As we shall see later, this *wondering*, in Voegelin's philosophy, constitutes an extremely important attitude, one that conditions the very possibility of transcendence in the context of political society. For Scheler (as for Voegelin), the adoption of such an attitude towards the world constitutes the basis of "religion" and metaphysics. Although Scheler is openly contemptuous of those who would turn to religion for the

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99. Cf. Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, tr. Bernard Noble (New York: Archon, 1960), 128: "The fount of all interest in metaphysics is the astonishment that anything at all should exist."

sake of comfort and security, he holds metaphysics, understood as the seeking of the *ground* (i.e. the ultimate reason) of reality, in high esteem in his thought.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, for Scheler it is part of man's essential constitution to question as to the why and wherefore of his existence.

### 1.2.3 Husserl's Theory of Consciousness

We saw earlier that Scheler, although not himself personally a student of Edmund Husserl (the founder of phenomenology), was deeply influenced by the latter's thought. We have also seen that Scheler's idea of man (i.e. his philosophical anthropology) is based on a multilevel hierarchy of being that, as we shall see, deeply influenced Voegelin. However, the influence that Husserl exerted on Voegelin was not positive as it largely was in the case of Scheler, but *negative*. In this section, we shall see why Husserl's theory of consciousness, which anchors his phenomenological philosophy, was unable to fulfill the aims of Voegelin's political philosophy, even as it spurred the latter to develop a conception of consciousness that is appropriate to political reality.

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<sup>56</sup> The difference between Scheler's view of "religion" and that of "metaphysics" are starkly demonstrated in this passage: "[...] *Metaphysik keine Versicherungsanstalt ist für schwache, stützungsbedürftige Menschen. Sie setzt bereits einen kräftigen hochgemuten Sinn im Menschen voraus.*" However vitriolic Scheler's comments on "religion" may be, it is the importance of the divine element in his idea of man that we emphasize. (Scheler, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*, 103).



Husserl's phenomenology aims to grasp the *essence* of something encountered in experience, by which is meant the sense, or *meaning* (*Sinn*) of these things experienced; thereby would he attain "apodictic certainty" regarding these objects, since it is the meaning of them that is in question, not their contingent existence.<sup>57</sup> If the domain, or region wherein the empirical sciences find their "real" objects is the natural world, phenomenology must turn elsewhere for its essential objects. For Husserl, this region is the state of being conscious of the surrounding world, or simply, that of consciousness (*Bewußtsein*), which is itself a mode of being.<sup>58</sup> Phenomenology is thus a theory of consciousness and at the same time a theory of being; for reality does not exist independently of consciousness but is dependant on it for any meaning that it might have for the individual. This relationship between reality and consciousness, which is central to phenomenology, is expressed by Husserl in his notion of *intentionality*,

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<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Husserl's *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1965 [1910]). Stated in greater detail, Husserl holds that his "pure" phenomenology is a "rigorous science" because it seeks not the contingent things of the natural world by their empirically given content, but their essence or meaning (for the subject), the being of which cannot be existentially contingent (it cannot either be or not be), and so is not subject to doubt.

<sup>58</sup> The German word for consciousness – *Bewußtsein* – captures the intentions of Husserl's phenomenological project in a way that cannot be rendered adequately in English. For the German word contains the adjective designating a state of consciousness (*bewußt*) as well as the noun *Sein* (being), which here specifies the being of the animate subject. This peculiarity of the German word applies also, of course, to Voegelin's usage of it, as we shall see.

according to which consciousness is always consciousness of something.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the subject gives meaning to its objects and thereby attains certitude of them.

The foregoing (very brief) overview of Husserl's project has served to provide a background for his intentions. We may thus go to the main point of contention between Husserl and Voegelin, which is the issue of Husserl's *historiography* of the philosophical tradition.<sup>60</sup> The specific occasion for Voegelin's concern with Husserl was the former's reading of Husserl's final work, the *Crisis of the European Sciences*, which addresses the relation of phenomenology to the history of the sciences and to philosophy.<sup>61</sup>

The main thrust of the *Krisis* is that Galileo's mathematization of nature in the empirical sciences has resulted in an idealization of nature whereby the reality of the world, in principle open to an infinity of interpretations of its meaning, is rendered, by means of the Galilean geometry, susceptible to exact mathematical

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<sup>59</sup> See Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologische Philosophie*, in *Husserliana III* (Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950 [1913]), 80 (§36): "[a]lle Erlebnisse, die [...] Wesenseigenschaften gemein haben, heißen auch »intentionale Erlebnisse« [...] insofern sie Bewußtsein von etwas sind."

<sup>60</sup> The question of history, incidentally, was not part of Husserl's earlier structural or "static" phenomenology, of which the *Ideen I* is perhaps the most important representation. In fact, Husserl had even "banished" this question from his phenomenology. See Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie*, 10n (§1).

<sup>61</sup> Husserl, *Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die Transzendente Phänomenologie*, in *Husserliana VI* (Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962 [1936]).

determination, thus producing an *episteme* (knowledge) that claims universal validity. However, according to Husserl, this process has resulted in the severance of theoretical from pre-theoretical experience, the latter not being susceptible to mathematization; yet this form of experience is that in which resides the very meaning and sense of the reality that is the object of scientific analysis. The meaning and human significance of the practical, lived reality, which Husserl calls the *Lebenswelt*, or life-world, is necessarily prior to its mathematization in the scientific understanding of reality, but is "forgotten" (*vergessen*) in the mathematization of knowledge. Husserl's phenomenology was to restore to man this lost meaning of his scientific advances that have been achieved through the Gallilean mathematization of nature.

Voegelin's thoughts on Husserl's philosophy come out most explicitly in his 1943 correspondence with his lifelong friend, the sociologist and phenomenologist Alfred Schütz.<sup>62</sup> Here, it becomes clear that Husserl's version of the history of philosophy was the greatest source of

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<sup>62</sup> Alfred Schütz and Eric Voegelin, *Eine Freundschaft, die ein Leben ausgehalten hat: Briefwechseln 1938-1959*, ed. Gerhard Wagner and Gilbert Weiss (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 2004). It should be noted that Voegelin's initial letter to Schütz regarding Husserl was included in German in Voegelin's *Anamnesis*, and is presently available in English in D. Walsh, ed., *CW*, Vol. 6, tr. M.J. Hanak (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002) (based on the 1978 translation by G. Niemeyer; however, an English translation of the complete correspondence between Schütz and Voegelin has not yet appeared. Hence all translations of citations from it here are my own.

Voegelin's reservations and objections regarding the Husserlian phenomenology. In Voegelin's letter of September 17, 1943 he does indeed praise Husserl's work at the start, calling the *Krisis* the "most meaningful epistemological achievement of contemporary times" and acknowledges Husserl's insistence on the transcendental position of the ego *vis-à-vis* the objectivity of the world.<sup>63</sup>

However, Voegelin found Husserl's work gravely deficient, particularly regarding its historical content, but also in its general orientation; he respected Husserl's work greatly, yet "this essay disappointed me like Husserl's other works — for while epistemology is an eminently important theme in philosophy, it does not exhaust the domain of philosophy."<sup>64</sup> Not only in the larger domain of philosophy but also in that of specifically *political* philosophy is a broader spectrum called for in order that an account of phenomena appropriate to this very domain be adequate to the subject matter, *i.e.*, the necessarily social nature of political reality as opposed to phenomena suited to the model of perception, as in Husserl's work. A very different philosophy of consciousness from that which is present in Husserl's

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<sup>63</sup> *Eine Freundschaft*, 153-54; *Anamnesis*, 21-22; *CW*, Vol. 6, 45-46.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 154; *Anamnesis*, 22; *CW*, Vol. 6, 46.

phenomenology is required for a philosophy of politics, which will be examined in the second part of this thesis.

Extensive accounts have already been furnished of the relation between Voegelin and Husserl.<sup>65</sup> For our purposes, it will simply be noted that Voegelin's criticisms of Husserl might be condensed into two main points. First, Husserl's historiography of Western thought, including the specific place of Husserl's phenomenology within this Husserlian version of the history of Western thought; and second, Husserl's idea of consciousness within which his particular phenomenology operates.

On the first point, Voegelin condemns Husserl's idea of history for its exclusion of historical materials: the "relevant history of humanity comes from Hellenic antiquity and the era of the Renaissance."<sup>66</sup> Between the ancient Greek *Urstiftung* (primordial donation or givenness of sense) and Descartes there would be nothing of significance; a similar emptiness existed between the Cartesian founding of modern philosophy in subjectivity and Husserl's own phenomenology. Husserl has disregarded vast tracts of history, namely everything from the Hellenic age until Descartes, and not

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<sup>65</sup> See especially H. Wagner, "Agreement in Discord: Alfred Schütz and Eric Voegelin", in Peter Opitz, ed., *The Philosophy of Order* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 74-90. See also H. Wagner, *Alfred Schütz: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), esp. 191-94; and also B. Cooper, *Eric Voegelin and the Foundations of Modern Political Science* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 176-87.

<sup>66</sup> *Eine Freundschaft*, 154; *Anamnesis*, 22; *CW*, Vol. 6, 46.

only that of the Occident, but also of other peoples; Chinese and Indian philosophy become "a slightly ridiculous curiosity on the periphery of the earth."<sup>67</sup> Thus Husserl, according to Voegelin, would find in such an abbreviated and hence distorted interpretation of the history of philosophy a teleological prelude to his own phenomenology, the true heir to Greek thought and thus the *Endstiftung* to philosophy as its transcendental basis, having made the necessary corrections to Descartes' substantial ego.

Further, and connected with this first point, phenomenology, in its foundational Husserlian manifestation, would be the completion of a teleological process stemming from the experience of the Greeks, a process which has been brought into clarity through the phenomenological method. Phenomenology plays a crucial part in the realization of human knowledge: it constitutes the *Endstiftung* or final "donation" of meaning to the history of European sciences, namely that which finds within itself the realization of its own teleology. Husserl thus finds in his own philosophy the completion of the philosophical tradition. According to this image of the history of philosophy, Husserlian phenomenologists would be, as Husserl himself says, "the functionaries of mankind,"<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 155; *Anamnesis*, 22; *CW*, Vol. 6, 46.

<sup>68</sup> Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften*, 15 (§7).

because their historical role was determined by phenomenology's "apodictic method." For this reason the Indians and Chinese are dismissed as "merely anthropological types."<sup>69</sup> Chiefly, it was against this messianic and exclusionary role that Husserl seemed to attach to his phenomenology that Voegelin reacted; the field of analysis that is properly the domain of politics (and thus the evidence upon which the political philosopher must draw) is much wider than that which is included in Husserl's history. And, as already mentioned, Husserl's exclusion of Chinese and Indian thought in particular Voegelin could not accept. The consequence was, for Voegelin, a severely truncated vision of history that could not adequately articulate political reality.

The second broad point of contention was Husserl's insistence on a "pure," i.e., non-empirical, basis for phenomenology. For Voegelin, the Husserlian demand for "pure" subjectivity involves what he calls the "I-tradition" (*Ich-Tradition*) out of which Husserl's thought emerges. This tradition of philosophizing, centred around the "I" of thinking (*viz.* Descartes and Husserl), is by no means correlative with history. Rather, it is part and parcel of a particular historiography. Husserl "stands only in a relationship to his tradition, but not to history, in

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 (§6).

which we stand." Husserl stands in the "closure of the I-tradition circle"; the consequence is that "Husserl's philosophy becomes incommunicable," which is to say that "it is irrelevant for everyone except Husserl himself. Phenomenology would become an intellectual game for Husserl."<sup>70</sup> For Voegelin's project, namely the development of a philosophy of consciousness that would be adequate to political reality, Husserl's notion of a consciousness that is geared to the attainment of apodictic certainty of its objects on the epistemological model, is wholly untenable since it could be of little relevance to the social reality in question, which for Voegelin, as we recall from the introduction, is of great importance to political philosophy. However, as we shall see in the next part, Voegelin's dissatisfaction with Husserl's phenomenology led him to develop a model of consciousness that is suited to a philosophy of politics.

This first part has been devoted to the question: what is philosophical anthropology? We have seen that this discipline seeks an answer to the more fundamental question: what is the nature of man and what distinguishes him from the animals? And this, we saw, is a very old question, having its origins in Greek thought and extending

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.



through the rise of Christianity. The former, represented in the thought of Plato and Aristotle, find the distinguishing trait of man to be his *rationality*; the latter, here represented by Augustine and Aquinas, stresses the *divine* quality of man, in particular the relation of the latter to his creator, man as created *imago Dei*.

Philosophical anthropology as a modern discipline has been largely based in Germany, and the work of its three major representatives (Scheler, Plessner, and Gehlen) finds, in different ways, that it is the relation of man to his *environment* that distinguishes him from the animals on the basis of certain uniquely human qualities. We devoted the most space to Scheler, for, as we shall see in the next part, it was he who most decisively influenced Voegelin's conception of consciousness in the context of political reality. By contrast, the influence of Husserl in this regard is negative, for the latter's theory of consciousness Voegelin found not to be pertinent to this reality of politics.

In the next part, then, we shall examine Voegelin's own philosophical anthropology in the light of our exposition of this tradition in this first part.

## **PART 2: Voegelin's Philosophical Anthropology**

Having set out an explanation of "philosophical anthropology" in the first part of this thesis, the task is now to develop and expound on Voegelin's own philosophical anthropology, which will be done with some reference to the thought of Husserl and Scheler and to the Greek and Christian accounts provided above. As with the previous part, the goal of this part will be achieved in two sections, each of which corresponds to a constituent element of Voegelin's conception of philosophical anthropology as he applied it to the political sphere, namely a philosophy of consciousness, and a philosophy of history. It should be stated at the start of this discussion that these two elements, consciousness and history, are not to be separated in such a manner that would imply their independence from each other, particularly in the context of Voegelin's later thought. This point is clarified below. For the moment it will suffice to state the main object of this second part of the thesis: to explain how and why Voegelin saw it appropriate to integrate these two components, consciousness and history, into a philosophical anthropology that is appropriate for a philosophy of politics.

## 2.1 Voegelin's Philosophy of Consciousness

At this point, the reader might well ask: why exactly did Voegelin find it at all necessary, or even useful, to elaborate a "theory" of consciousness? After all, we just saw that Voegelin found Husserl's phenomenology (probably one of the most comprehensive explications of consciousness that has ever been furnished) to be inadequate to the field of political science. So why discuss consciousness at all?

In the forward to his *Anamnesis*, Voegelin explains the importance of consciousness to his own interest: "The problems of human order in society and history arise from the order of consciousness. The philosophy of consciousness is for that reason the centrepiece (*Kernstück*) of a philosophy of politics."<sup>71</sup> That is to say: men in society orient themselves in a determinate manner, *i.e.*, they might incline themselves towards one course of action or another. This outward manifestation of human action in community is by no means determined at random, but is the result of conscious deliberation on the part of the individuals who constitute this very community, not unlike the men in Plato's *Republic*. In this way would the order according to which a society governs itself at the larger, or "higher," social level, reveal itself in the consciousness of the

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<sup>71</sup> Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 7; *CW*, Vol. 6, 33.

individuals who comprise the community at this "lower" personal level.

A theory of politics that would shun this interior individual level at which the societal order reveals itself could well fall into meaningless abstractions with little bearing on the actual political reality. In the lines which follow the passage just cited, Voegelin mentions the "misery" of the contemporary political science, which at the time had sunken into "neo-Kantian epistemology, value-relating methods, historicism, descriptive institutionalism, and ideological speculations on history," a misery which could only "be remedied with the help of a new philosophy of consciousness."<sup>72</sup> Voegelin's own philosophy of consciousness did not emerge, however, in its complete form on any one occasion, but rather was achieved over the span of some forty years, from his 1928 book *Über die Form des Amerikanischen Geistes* through to his work *Anamnesis* of 1966.

Indeed, one finds in Voegelin's oeuvre certain changes of emphasis that bear on the changing position of consciousness in his thought. This has been documented by P. Opitz, who comments that Voegelin's writings since the beginning of the 1930's developed "over three long phases", which "are neither sharply indicated, nor run divided from

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

each other, but are distinguished through longer sliding (*längere gleitende*), indeed overlapping transitions and superimposing levels."<sup>73</sup> The first of these three phases is occupied with the explication of "ideas", beginning with Voegelin's work with the "race idea" and with legal positivism, culminating in the *History of Political Ideas* (1939-53);<sup>74</sup> the second is characterized by a focus on individual *experience* (*Erfahrung*) of the reality of order and its symbolisation as manifested in the course of history (notably in *Order and History* and *The New Science of Politics*). The third development in Voegelin's writings is characterized by a primary concern with *consciousness* (*Bewußtsein*), a concern to which we now turn.

### 2.1.1 The Centrality of Individual Experience

As Opitz notes in the passage cited above, the three stages that comprise Voegelin's writings do not correspond to any strict temporal order of development but rather overlap in their chronological order. This is especially true with regard to Voegelin's interest in consciousness, which is manifest as early as his 1928 book, *Über die Form*

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<sup>73</sup> Peter Opitz, "Auf der Suche nach der Realität und ihrer Ordnung: Zur werkgeschichtlichen Einordnung von Eric Voegelins *Anamnesis*", in Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 396.

<sup>74</sup> This stage in the development of Voegelin's thinking includes, as will duly be discussed, a great concern with philosophical anthropology, particularly in the context of European racism.

*des Amerikanischen Geistes*.<sup>75</sup> This concern continues through the 1930s to his critical engagement with Husserl's phenomenology in 1943, which we discussed in section 1.2.3 of the present essay, though only in terms of Voegelin's negative reception of it. We shall now explain the alternative conception of consciousness that Voegelin developed, hence his positive response to what were, in his view, the shortcomings of Husserl's phenomenology. This alternative conception of consciousness emerged the following year, in a piece that Voegelin sent to Schütz for comment, entitled "*Zur Theorie des Bewußtseins*," and which he included in the first part of *Anamnesis*.<sup>76</sup>

The philosophy of Voegelin and that of Husserl are both centred around the consciousness of the individual. However, it is the specific "content" of this consciousness concerning its relation to society and history that is of particular concern to Voegelin, a characteristic that Husserl's "pure" consciousness conspicuously lacked, as Voegelin notes in a passage that is worth quoting at length:

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<sup>75</sup> Voegelin, *On the Form of the American Mind*, in J. Gebhardt and B. Cooper, eds., *CW*, Vol. 1 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995 [1928]). Here, Voegelin addresses certain contemporary theories of consciousness, among them those of George Santayana, Shadworth Hodgson, and Husserl.

<sup>76</sup> Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 37-60. Translated as "On the Theory of Consciousness", in *CW*, Vol. 6, 62-83.

Above all: there is no absolute beginning for a philosophy of consciousness. All philosophizing about consciousness is an event [*Ereignis*] in the consciousness of the philosopher [*des Philosophierenden*] and presupposes this consciousness itself with its structures. Insofar as the consciousness of the philosopher is not a "pure" consciousness, but rather the consciousness of a human being, all philosophizing is an event in the life-history of the philosopher; further, in the history of the community with its symbolic language, in which it lives; further, in history of humankind; and further, in the history of the cosmos. No "human being" (*Mensch*) in his reflection (*Besinnung*) on consciousness and its essence can make consciousness into an "object" against which he would stand; the reflection is rather an orientation within the realm of consciousness [*Bewußtseinsraums*], which he can push to its limits, but never exceed. Consciousness is given in the elementary sense, in that systematic reflection on consciousness is a late event in the biography of the philosopher. The philosopher always lives in the context of his own history as the history of a human existence in the community and in the world.<sup>77</sup>

In this passage, which may be considered representative of Voegelin's conception of consciousness as it existed in the mid-1940's (on which we shall dwell for the moment) many elements may be found that relate to his view of man in relation to society and history, elements that Voegelin found to be deplorably absent in Husserl's phenomenology. This absence, which made Husserl's thought unsuitable for a philosophy of politics, is related to his lack of a philosophical anthropology.

In our account of the Voegelin/Schütz correspondence we drew attention to Husserl's insistence on a "pure" (*i.e.*

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-58; *CW*, Vol. 6, 81.

non-substantial) consciousness that would not constitute a part of the world that is its object. Voegelin, however, strenuously denied that it is even possible for man to take such a neutral position with respect to the concrete world in which he is inextricably rooted. We recall Scheler's philosophical anthropology, according to which man cannot be understood on the basis of merely one or another mode of being, but that he constitutes several such modes (inorganic, plant, animal, human) and is able at the same time to transcend his earthly existence through his participation in divine being. To postulate a consciousness that would be independent of the concrete world as manifested in any particular mode of being would be to disregard the diverse constitution of human being that reveals itself in human existence in society and history. Hence Voegelin says that "[c]onsciousness is not a monad, which has the form of existence of the image of an instant, but is human existence, *i.e.*, consciousness in the foundation of the body and in the external world."<sup>78</sup>

It is in this sense that Voegelin says that there is no "absolute beginning" (*Ansatz*) for a philosophy of consciousness as Husserl would have it: "consciousness" is not an abstraction but is rather the concrete awareness and attention that a person has in regards to the world around

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 55; CW, Vol. 6, 79.



him; consciousness is thus rooted in society and history since human persons do not live in a vacuum but with other persons in a community in a given time. It follows that consciousness cannot be "pure" in Husserl's sense because it is impregnated with those symbols and meanings that originate in the individual's own history, at both the personal and societal levels. Such are the presuppositions with which a theory of consciousness must operate in order to be relevant to a philosophy of politics.

Furthermore, in the above passage Voegelin remarks that a philosophy of consciousness must take as its point of departure the life of the individual philosopher and that the exploration of consciousness is a "late event in the biography" of that philosopher, and further, a history of his own existence in society and in the world which he would explicate not by taking his own consciousness as an "object", but by a *meditative process*. Voegelin explains this broader idea of consciousness in the same piece, which was occasioned by a "dissatisfaction (*Unbefriedigtseins*) with the results of a philosophical investigation which has for its object an analysis of inner time-consciousness."<sup>79</sup> This occupation with the consciousness of time (most

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 37; CW, Vol. 6, 62.

notably in Husserl<sup>80</sup>) is however a "laicist residue of the Christian assurance of existence (*Existenzvergewisserung*) in the meditation with its spiritual climax in the *intentio animi* toward God."<sup>81</sup>

Thus, in Voegelin's view, consciousness cannot be approached on the basis of the methods that have been previously employed, in particular those that are based on the "selection of a simple, sensible perception" such as the perception of a tone, which "seems to me not at all to be an elementary path to an understanding of the problem of time."<sup>82</sup> A comprehensive theory of consciousness, which Voegelin's philosophy required, could not understand consciousness in isolation or abstraction from the individual's particular involvement in society and history. An abstract theory based on the model of tone perception cannot adequately capture the *experience* of this particular individual, which encompasses much more than the fleetingness of any given moment of his life. Thus "the interest in the "flowing" is not the primary one."<sup>83</sup> If an adequate philosophy of politics must be founded on the experiences of the individual within his society, and this

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<sup>80</sup> See esp. Husserl, *Zur Phenomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* (1893-1917), in *Husserliana*, Vol. 10 (Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966 [1905]).

<sup>81</sup> Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 37; CW, Vol. 6, 62).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 39; CW, Vol. 6, 64.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

consciousness is not to be *limited* to a simple model of perceptual orientation (which for Voegelin would constitute a deformity of consciousness), what structure would this "model" of consciousness have in order that it be apt for an analysis of problems that pertain to political society?

### 2.1.2 The Structure of Consciousness

According to Voegelin's conception of consciousness as it emerged in the mid-1940's, consciousness is not "pure" or empty, but bears a certain energy or force (*Kraftzentrum*) that is its distinguishing characteristic and "situates itself (*befindet sich*) in a process, which cannot be observed from the outside [...] but has the character of inner 'illuminated-being' (*Erhellenseins*); i.e., it does not operate (*läuft*) blindly, but is in its inner dimension experienceable by the past and the future."<sup>84</sup> Voegelin continues, saying that "the illuminatory dimensions (*Erhellungsdimensionen*) of past and future do not become visible as empty spaces, but the structures of finite processes between birth and death. The experience of consciousness is the experience of a process – the single process that we know from within."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 44; *CW*, Vol. 6, 68.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

As with Scheler, the key element here, for Voegelin, is the "subjective" or "interior" (*inne*) perspective by which man approaches the world and his own existence in it: it is on account of this very subjectivity that consciousness "illuminates" (*erhell*t) man's existence in the world and his *experience* in it, *i.e.*, that by virtue of man's consciousness, the reality of his surroundings becomes understandable for him because it is then accessible to his *rationality*. To be sure, man, existing in political society, does not live his day-to-day existence as if he were a "subject" who would approach his "objects" from a neutral perspective. His perspective cannot be neutral with respect to the world because he, the individual, has a *history*. This individual is, in turn, part of a society, as mentioned in the long passage cited earlier in this section. These elements condition the fundamental character of consciousness, which we showed to be, at this stage in Voegelin's thought, "process." By this Voegelin means that man does not exist as an abstraction, but between life and death, or more specifically, between his own birth (coming into being) and his own death (cessation of being). It must be emphasized here that the process undergone by the individual between life and death is not one in which the sole participants are the

individual as "subject" and the world as "object," but rather one that is infused with *meaning* drawn from the society in which that individual lives and is thus "embedded." Man cannot be divorced from his society, for the reality in which he lives his life *means* something to him. To detach man from this fundamental socially entrenched meaning borne by individuals by means of abstractions, etc., would be to disregard the primary manifestation of *order* according to which a society lives, which is none other than *myth*.

Although we shall discuss the importance of myth for Voegelin in more detail in the third part of this thesis, a few words on this point would be in order here in relation to the development of Voegelin's idea of consciousness. Whereas we just spoke of experiences that are grasped from within consciousness, we have not yet discussed "consciousness-transcendent process," which "is not experienceable from within and for that reason, for the designation of its structure, no symbols are available other than those on the occasion of (*zur Verfügung*) finite experiences."<sup>86</sup> This is so because we are dealing here with a situation in which "finite processes" (*i.e.*, those events of which the individual has "first-hand experience") must be explained by "processes" that *transcend* the

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

consciousness of this individual. Those experiences, according to Voegelin, "are the most important source of the creation of myths. A myth-symbol is a finite symbol that is supposed to be 'transparent' for a transfinite process."<sup>87</sup> Voegelin gives examples of this sort of transfinite process, communicated in myth, which include: the myth of creation; that of immaculate conception; the anthropomorphic image of God; speculation on the immortality of the soul; and the myth of the Fall and original sin. These phenomena cannot be apprehended by a consciousness that relates itself only to the present moment, as does the Husserlian model of consciousness. These phenomena are in no way meaningless; on the contrary, such myths have imported meaning to the existence of men and civilizations, and continue to do so. As we shall examine in greater detail further on, myth constitutes an important component of political reality.

In the first part of this thesis, we saw that some of the myths listed above emerged in the context of Christian philosophical anthropology. Here, we shall draw attention to a particular aspect of the process between birth and death as discussed in the above passages: that of *transcendence* with respect to present consciousness. Voegelin says that "the capacity for transcendence

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

(*Transzendenzfähigkeit*) is a fundamental characteristic of consciousness, just like illumination (*Erhellung*); it is a given (*das Vorgegebene*)."<sup>88</sup> For Voegelin, transcendence (the movement towards the *beyond* of the present natural world) is thus not something entirely mystical, nor a capacity that is extraneous to human consciousness. Rather, the capacity for transcendence is part and parcel of human consciousness.

Now, we recall that in Scheler's thought, the ability of man to transcend his earthly existence distinguishes him from the animals, in the sense that he thereby has the capacity to stand at a distance from the world and wonder about its origin and his own place in the "cosmos" (what Scheler calls "metaphysics"). Voegelin understands the position of man in political society along similar lines. Like Scheler, Voegelin notes that man is susceptible to ask: "Why is there something and not instead nothing?"; in this way, consciousness "is capable of raising itself above finite experience only to transcendental reflection on the structure of subjectivity, in which the objective order of things in the world is constituted."<sup>89</sup> Man would thus be capable of holding himself at a distance from his society and indeed the material world, even as he constitutes a

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 51, CW, Vol. 6, 75.

part of it, by reflecting on his existence in it. This characteristic of man carries an important implication for Voegelin's conception of consciousness.

This is that consciousness is not "pure" but reveals itself to be "based on animal, vegetative, and inorganic being and is first on this basis the consciousness of a human being." The constitution of man in his various "levels" of being is the "ontic presupposition for his transcendence (*Transzendieren*) in the world, for in none of its directions of transcending does it find a level of being that would not also be a level on which it itself is based."<sup>90</sup> The possibility of transcendence is thus given in the very constitution of man himself, for within man can be found not only the variegated concrete levels of being (vegetable, animal, inorganic), but also the capacity to *meditate* upon his place in the world.

For this reason Voegelin says: "Man presents himself in the 'fundamental experience' as the epitome of the cosmos, as a microcosmos."<sup>91</sup> This is because for Voegelin the "cosmos" constitutes not merely the entities of the

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-52; *CW*, Vol. 6, 75. Man's multi-levelled being is the "ontische Voraussetzung für sein Transzendieren in die Welt zu sein, denn das Bewußtsein findet in keiner seiner Transzendenzrichtungen eine Seinsstufe, die nicht auch eine Seinsstufe wäre, in der es selbst fundiert ist." N.B. Voegelin's phrase "*Transzendieren in die Welt*": the accusative case here signifies *direction*, like we saw earlier in Augustine, and is related to the tension of existence, as we shall explore below in section 3.1.2.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*



physical universe, but the totality of being in both its material and spiritual dimensions, as will be explored in greater detail in the next section. To understand being merely in its material aspect and to disregard the spiritual would be to remove from an account of man's place in the cosmos an explanation of his origin and that of the world. For under the "spiritual" aspect of being falls an account of the place of the divine in human existence, which is not material but transcends the immanent world of direct experience.

In his correspondence with Schütz, we recall, Voegelin expressed a serious reservation about Husserl's exclusion of the divine element in Descartes' *Meditations* from his phenomenology, which is his theory of consciousness. Now in his own conception of consciousness, Voegelin introduces this capacity of consciousness as an "experiential complex of meditation, at the climax of which the intention of consciousness is not directed objectively towards the world-immanent content, but non-objectively towards the world-transcendent ground of being."<sup>92</sup> This "turning" of consciousness is directed away from the objective world and towards that which transcends it, namely, the Christian God (in the case of Descartes), though in Voegelin, as we shall see, such a divine entity is by no means to be restricted

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

to Christianity. On the contrary, in diverse religions and cultures may be found the presence of world-transcendent being, which is an essential part of the social *milieu* that constitutes political society, according to Voegelin. It is to this revelation of cosmic order in political society in the field of *history* that we now turn.

## 2.2 Voegelin's Philosophy of History

The task of this part being the explanation of Voegelinian philosophical anthropology, which we said incorporates a philosophy of consciousness with a philosophy of history, must be achieved with a consideration of Voegelin's philosophy of history. Now, at the start of this second part, we noted that Voegelin's oeuvre may be divided into three parts: the first centred around political ideas, the second on the experience of societies and their adequate symbolization, and the third on consciousness as the "place" (*Ort*) of this symbolization. Here we shall examine the second of these overlapping stages; we thus aim to explicate the manner by which the experience of individuals in society finds its symbolization in history, and the relation of this symbolization to Voegelin's philosophical anthropology.

### 2.2.1 Experience and Symbolization

Voegelin begins the introduction to his work, *The New Science of Politics*, with the words: "The existence of man in political society is historical existence; and a theory of politics, if it penetrates to principles, must at the same time be a theory of history."<sup>93</sup> However, a "theory of history," particularly concerning politics, ought not to restrict its field of investigation to the political institutions proper to a given society, but investigate the "nature of representation as the form by which a political society gains existence for action in history."<sup>94</sup> Now, as we stressed in the previous section, an adequate understanding of politics, according to Voegelin, cannot rest on abstractions, whether these be of human institutions or any other aspect of political society; hence the unsuitability of Husserlian phenomenology for a theory of politics - because it does not deal with concrete reality, but with "ideal" abstractions of it. Therefore, it is necessary to turn to the concrete reality of men who live in political society, a reality that finds its expression in the *symbolization* of it by its individual members.

The foregoing remarks may be clarified by referring to the preface to the five-volume *Order and History*,

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<sup>93</sup> Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 1.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

Voegelin's *magnum opus*, which begins with one of his best-known phrases:

The order of history emerges from the history of order. Every society is burdened with the task, under its concrete conditions, of creating an order that will endow the fact of its existence with meaning in terms of ends divine and human. And the attempts to find the symbolic forms that will adequately express the meaning, while imperfect, do not form a senseless series of failures. For the great societies, beginning with the civilizations of the ancient Near East, have created a sequence of orders, intelligibly connected with one another as advances toward, or recessions from, an adequate symbolization of truth concerning the order of being of which the order of society is a part.<sup>95</sup>

In order to decipher the sense of the opening phrase in this passage, an explanation of the means and the rationale according to which a society expresses its "order" is required, a matter that is, as will be explained in this section, closely related to Voegelin's philosophical anthropology.

We may begin by remarking that the members of any given human society do not live merely for the sake of their own survival, nor for that of the species, as do the animals. For, as we saw in the first part of this thesis, man is essentially distinct from animal life, although he does share certain modes of being with the latter, *e.g.*, the mode of "animal" being as manifested by biologically-

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<sup>95</sup> Voegelin, *Order and History*, Vol. 1: *Israel and Revelation*, in M.P. Hogan, ed., *CW*, Vol. 14 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001 [1956]), 19.

rooted drives. Yet, the being of man does, says Voegelin (echoing Scheler), encompass a diversity of modes of being, most notably the divine or spiritual element. Spiritual being in Voegelin's thought, as in the Christian idea of man, carries important implications for the social and political orientation of any society, as it does for him who seeks to undertake an analysis of political reality.

As stated earlier, at this stage of Voegelin's thought, the emphasis is on the *experience of order* in political society that individuals have. This experience of order is at the same time the experience of being because "God and man, world and society, form a primordial community of being," which is "known to man by virtue of his participation in the mystery of being."<sup>96</sup> However, man does not experience his relation to God, or in general to the divine element, "in the manner of an object in the external world but is knowable only from the perspective of his participation in it."<sup>97</sup> Man thus does not approach the world as an external observer would the things around him. Rather, he participates actively in the order of being by virtue of the fact that he exists at all. Hence, participation in being "is not a partial involvement of man; he is engaged with the whole of his existence, for

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

participation is existence itself."<sup>98</sup> In this sense, man is not a "self-contained spectator" but "an actor, playing a part in the drama of being and, through the brute fact of his existence, committed to play it without knowing what it is."<sup>99</sup> Man thus does not exist in political society with absolute knowledge of his condition; consequently, the knowledge that he has (or claims to have) of the order of being, is necessarily defective, which is of great importance to his place in political society.

Further, man's participation in being, despite his lack of absolute knowledge, is not characterized by a complete ignorance: man's knowledge of his position in the order of being (that is, his position in the world and society, and indeed, in the cosmos) is rendered intelligible to himself through the symbolism that he develops on the basis of his experience in the order of being, that is, from his experience in the world and society. A "symbol," a notion that we have already alluded to, is a representation of this reality; symbols bear meaning for the individuals in society because they constitute expressions of their experiences, at both the individual and collective levels. Thus Voegelin says, in a well-known statement:

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

Human society is not merely a fact, or an event in the external world to be studied by an observer like a natural phenomenon. Though it has externality as one of its natural components, it is as a whole a little world, a cosmion, illuminated with meaning from within by the human beings who continuously create and bear it as the mode and condition of their self-realization.<sup>100</sup>

This passage, which bears especially on the analyst's method of approaching political phenomena (as we shall explore in greater detail in the final part), indicates that for Voegelin the *meaning* borne by individuals in society finds its expression in such a way that is not analogous to objects in the natural world. The form of expression of a society concerns "the relation between its members and groups of members, as well as its existence as a whole, transparent for the mystery of human existence."<sup>101</sup> The existence of man in the world is indeed a mystery, and the symbolic expression of it carries, according to Voegelin, significant implications for political order.

While Voegelin was to retain the idea of man's participation in being as the fundamental condition of man in the political reality of his existence and that of its symbolic expression on a social scale, which we have been describing as it existed in the first part of *Order and History*, the structure of human consciousness with regard

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<sup>100</sup> Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 27.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

to the dimension of history changed fundamentally in the fourth volume of the work with Voegelin's concept of *historiogenesis*, to which we now turn.

### 2.2.2 Historiogenesis

Historiogenesis, a word of Voegelin's coinage, denotes a "peculiar type of speculation on the order of society, its origin, and its course in time."<sup>102</sup> It is a certain conception of history that is central to Voegelin's thought, and must be carefully distinguished from the familiar "linear" sense of temporally successive events. For "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."<sup>103</sup> These lines will become more lucid in considering that mere "events," carefully recorded as they might be by the competent historian, do not capture the specifically participatory experiences of individuals, within political community, in the full diversity of being. Now, man's participation in being, as we have seen, is not to be reduced to any one level of being, but comprises a plurality of modes: inorganic, animal, human, and divine.

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<sup>102</sup> Voegelin, *Order and History, Volume IV: The Ecumenic Age*, in M. Franz, ed., *CW*, Vol. 17 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 108.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.



The divine element in man which we saw previously, for example in Augustine's soliloquy and in Scheler, is that part of him that might seek after and strive to know his origins, destiny, and place in the cosmos. It is in this context that Voegelin's concept of historiogenesis must be located, but at the societal level with which the conscious individual is intertwined in his daily existence.

Voegelin's rejection of a linear form of history means that the "process of history, and such an order as can be discerned in it, is not a story to be told from the beginning to its happy, or unhappy, end; it is a mystery in the process of revelation."<sup>104</sup>

Historiogenesis, since it is a conception of history that is not based on linear progression in time, seeks instead to analyse the *shifts* in manifestation of order in their relation to the ground of being. This struggle for cosmological order in society that is Voegelin's concern is exemplified in the polemic of Voltaire (1694-1778) against the French pro-monarchist Bossuet (1627-1704). Bossuet's insistence on the divine right of kings constitutes a cosmological view of the order of man, God, world, and

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 51. For this reason, the first three volumes of *Order and History*, which take the form of such a linear history of political order (*Israel and Revolution*, *The World of the Polis*, *Plato and Aristotle*), were abandoned for the historigenetic structure of Volume 4 in order to accommodate the changed place of historical consciousness.

society, following Voegelin's formulation. According to K. Löwith:

The crisis in the history of European consciousness, when *providence was replaced by progress*, occurred at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries. It is marked by the transition from Bossuet's *Discourse on Universal History* (1681), which is the last theology of history on the pattern of Augustine, to Voltaire's *Essay on the Manners and Mind of Nations* (1756), which is the first "philosophy of history," a term invented by Voltaire.<sup>105</sup>

The case of Voltaire demonstrates that the fundamental element in this decisive shift, indeed of eschatological significance according to Voegelin's historiogenetic approach, is not the mode of symbolization of the experiences of order in society, but, as previously mentioned, the *place* in which the symbolization has its primary manifestation. This location now is none other than *consciousness itself*: "The new truth pertains to man's consciousness of his humanity in participatory tension toward the divine ground, and to no reality beyond this restricted area."<sup>106</sup> The result is that "history" becomes a component or aspect inherent to the *structure* of human consciousness. Within this historiogenetic structure by which man relates himself to his origin, he "discovers the something in his humanity that is the site and sensorium of

<sup>105</sup> Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 104. Emphasis added.

<sup>106</sup> Voegelin, *Order and History*, Vol. 4, 53. Emphasis added.

divine presence; and he finds such words as *psyche*, or *pneuma*, or *nous*, to symbolize the something."<sup>107</sup> As we saw in the first part of the present work, in both Greek and Christian philosophical anthropology, there is within man an element that relates him to his "ground," or reason for existing at all on earth, whether it be the Greek *nous* or the soul. It is the attitude that man adopts towards this "something," i.e., towards the invisible presence of the divine element in his being, that according to Voegelin shows itself in the symbolism, or mode of expression, of man in the context of political reality. This subject, however, we shall address properly in the final part of the present thesis; for the moment we shall continue to explicate the concept of historiogenesis. Further explanation of it requires, however, an account of Voegelin's notion of the "cosmos."

Historiogenesis, we have said, signifies not any recorded sequence of events that would be independent of man's experience and thus of his consciousness, but a "peculiar structure in history" which "originates in the stratification of man's consciousness through the process of differentiation."<sup>108</sup> Voegelin's term "differentiation" (and his notion of "differentiated consciousness")

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

designates a form of consciousness that is closely bound up with, but does not, strictly speaking, oppose what he calls the "compact" consciousness and experience of men in society. Differentiated and compact consciousness are distinguished by their respective modes of symbolic expression: whereas both forms of consciousness are concerned with historiogenetic speculation, *i.e.*, with societal order and origin, compact consciousness expresses itself in *myth*, but differentiated consciousness in philosophical insight (what the Greeks called *episteme*).

According to Voegelin, differentiated experience and its symbolic expression as well as its compact counterpart both refer to the *same reality*: it is this reality which Voegelin calls the *cosmos*. This concept will require some explanation so as not to confuse Voegelin's usage of it with its usual, materialist, connotation. Voegelin says:

The cosmos is not a thing among others; it is the background of reality against which all existent things exist; it has reality in the mode of nonexistence, hence the cosmological play with mutual analogies cannot come to rest on a firm basis outside itself; it can do no more than make a particular area of reality (in this case: society and its order in history) transparent for the mystery of existence over the abyss of nonexistence.<sup>109</sup>

In this passage we find several themes that we have encountered up to this point, which we shall now use to

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

explain the notion of "cosmos" in relation to that of historiogenesis by means of the two classes of consciousness mentioned above.

The cosmos, to the conscious individual in society, does not appear as an "object" that would be susceptible to external observation and appraisal. Man's experience of the cosmos is most fundamentally "the experience of an underlying, intangible embracingness, from a something that can supply existence, consubstantiality, and order to all areas of reality even though it does not itself belong as an existent thing to any one of these areas."<sup>110</sup> The implication here is that, if there is more than a single "area of reality," the earthly, or immanent, domain is not the only one that is to be included in the notion of "cosmos." Along with physically existing entities in the cosmos, there are also those that are nonexistent, notably the divine, which is the invisible *ground* of all that exists in the world, but that, like Augustine's God, have a different *mode of being* than the existing being, namely, the divine or non-existent being.

Therefore, the cosmos is not, for Voegelin, to be considered as analogous to the "astrophysical universe" of scientific analysis, according to which the cosmos would be "too much existent to function as the nonexistent ground of

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

reality, and the gods are discovered as too little existent to form a realm of intracosmic things."<sup>111</sup> This vision of the cosmos, which assumes the world-immanent status of reality, does not allow room for the *ground* of the fleeting existing things of the world. In Voegelin's sense, on the contrary, the cosmos encompasses — indeed, "embraces" — the totality of reality irrespective of its mode of being. To exclude certain segments of this comprehensive meaning of the cosmos from one's understanding of it would thus be to deform reality, the political implications of which we shall explore in the next part.

An explanation of Voegelin's idea of the cosmos was necessary because it is the *experience* that man has of this larger reality that is symbolized and thus finds expression in the political sphere. The most basic form of such experience, according to Voegelin, is what he calls "the primary experience of the cosmos," which

is neither the external world of objects given to a subject of cognition, nor is it the world that has been created by a world-transcendent God. Rather, it is the whole, *to pan*, of an earth below and a heaven above—of celestial bodies and their movements; of seasonal changes; of fertility rhythms in plant and animal life, birth and death; but above all, as Thales

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 127. It is for this reason that we remarked in a footnote, in section 1.2.2, regarding Scheler's *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*, on the appropriateness of the original German title of this work to Voegelin's philosophy. For like Scheler, Voegelin emphasizes man's inherent association not only with the physical "world" (and thus with the "astrophysical universe") but also with its nonexistent Beyond.

still knew, it is a cosmos full of gods. This last point, that the gods are intracosmic, cannot be stressed strongly enough, because it is almost eclipsed today by such facile categorizations as polytheism and monotheism. The numbers are not important but rather the consciousness of divine reality as intracosmic or transmundane.<sup>112</sup>

This experience of the cosmos is primary not because it is most "fundamental" but because it is historically prior to any other, according to Voegelin, having been the experience of the Mesopotamians and the Egyptians, the Hebrews and the Greeks. The experience of the cosmos may thus be understood as that of a concrete world subsisting beneath an all-powerful and omniscient but hidden divine entity, and finds its primary mode of expression in the cosmological myths and legends that are proper to it, *e.g.*, those civilizations named above. It is this cosmological reality that, owing to the accessibility of its very concreteness, forms the "background" from which is drawn the experience of the conscious individual in society.

We are now in a position to discuss the distinction between compact and differentiated consciousness, each of which are understandings of the same overarching reality which is the cosmos. Compact consciousness and the experience with which it is related does not depart fundamentally in terms of its spiritual insight from the primary experience of the cosmos, *i.e.* that of an "earth

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

below and a heaven above." Differentiated consciousness, on the other hand, of which the highest expression is found in philosophy, connotes that mode of experience in which the individual man might inquire as to the *ground of being* (including that of his own), a form of expression of the cosmological reality that is more clearly articulated than "compact" experience, which also stems, as we have said, from the same "primary experience .of the cosmos."

It is important to remember that "[t]he two experiences do not pertain to different realities but to the same reality in different modes. The experience of cosmic reality includes in its compactness the existential tension; and the differentiated consciousness of existence has no reality without the cosmos in which it occurs."<sup>113</sup> The "tension" here relates to the ground of being and will be addressed properly in the next part in its relation to political reality. For the moment we shall examine the implication of the common reality of which two different experiences (compact and differentiated) are possible.

It is on account of this reason, that in "history" (in the historiogenetic sense) there is one fundamental ("primary") experience of the cosmos but a multiplicity of historical expressions of it (e.g., the Mesopotamian,

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<sup>113</sup> Voegelin, "Immortality," in E. Sandoz, ed., *Published Essays 1966-85*, in *CW*, Vol. 12 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 93.



Egyptian, etc.), that Voegelin speaks of "equivalences" in the societal expressions of order concerning cosmological experience. This experience, we have said, will find its societal expression in the form of the symbols that articulate the socio-political order according to which this community lives. But each society will have differing symbols by which it expresses its order. For this reason, the expression of diverse equivalences "implies the theoretical insight that not the symbols themselves but the constants of the engendering experience are the true subject matter of our studies."<sup>114</sup> The "constant" (and there is fundamentally only one) cannot be found in the diversity of historical symbols of experience, for "the flux of existence does not have the structure of order [...] but the structure of a tension between truth and the deformation of reality."<sup>115</sup> If the truth of societal order cannot be realized in the field of history, neither in the factual events (*res gestae*) nor in the cosmological myths, how can this truth of societal order be discovered, if it exists at all? These are questions that shall be addressed in the final part of this thesis.

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<sup>114</sup> Voegelin, "Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History," in *CW*, Vol. 12, 115.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

The goal of this second part has been to give an account of Voegelin's philosophical anthropology. This we determined to consist of a certain integration of a philosophy of consciousness and a philosophy of history. However, the latter does not exist independently of human consciousness, but is a constituent of this latter, in the form of what Voegelin calls "historiogenesis," which is a type of speculation on the origin and destiny of man. This term bears directly on Voegelin's philosophical anthropology for it implies a capacity, inherent to man, to inquire as to, and formulate a coherent account of, his origins and the relation of himself to what Voegelin calls "the primary experience of the cosmos." In Voegelin's thought, this notion is not merely a cosmological musing, but carries important political implications, which will be drawn out in the next part.

### **PART 3: Voegelin's Notion of Political Reality**

The first two parts of this essay have been concerned (1) with giving an account of the tradition of philosophical anthropology and (2) with explaining Voegelin's own philosophical anthropology. Thus we have seen: first, that philosophical anthropology is that discipline concerned with the essential constitution of man; and second, that Voegelin's contribution to this tradition finds in man a multi-levelled structure of being that includes a capacity for historiogenesis.

The task now is to explain how Voegelin applied his philosophical anthropology to the domain of political reality. This objective will be accomplished in two main sections: the first will deal with a further clarification of the notion of the "tension toward the ground of being", which we treated only provisionally in the second part of this thesis. The second section will consider Voegelin's concrete application of philosophical anthropology in political science in the face of the "loss of reality" that may arise in political society in relation to the discipline of philosophical anthropology in the context of political science.

### 3.1 Consciousness of Order and Political Science

As stated in the foregoing remarks, this part of the present thesis will attempt to explain Voegelin's notion of political reality, not merely in itself, but also in relation to the task of the political scientist and in view of Voegelin's philosophical anthropology as set forth *supra*. Voegelin broaches this subject perhaps most directly in the third and final part of his *Anamnesis*, which is made up of one single essay.

#### 3.1.1 Principles of Political Science

The aforementioned piece, entitled "*Was ist politische Realität?*", was composed in response to a 1965 speaking invitation that had a stipulation as to its content: "it is to be a lecture on fundamental principles (*Grundsätze*)."<sup>116</sup> More specifically, the lecture was to be about the principles that should underpin the study of political science. This point is by no means extraneous to the content of the lecture, as Voegelin makes clear from the second paragraph. Here, he says that not all "principles" can be adequate to the explanation and analysis of certain classes of phenomena. Specifically: the principles or

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<sup>116</sup> Voegelin, "*Was ist Politische Realität?*," in *Anamnesis*, 283; *CW*, Vol. 6, 341.

axioms that constitute the basis of mathematics, while they may appropriately apply to the empirical sciences, do not and cannot apply to political science. Thus, he says: "We state, first of all, that the counterpart to the axiomatization of mathematics [...] cannot be accomplished in political science because political science has no body of propositions that are comparable to those of mathematics, which can be axiomatized."<sup>117</sup> This is because political science is not a discipline that has for its object the study of inanimate things, but rather of *people* living in community, whose behavior is not analogous to the things of nature, this latter being the concern of the empirical sciences.

Therefore, if political science is not to be founded on axioms, it requires another foundation, one that is applicable to its subject. Thus, Voegelin says: "The core of political science is a noetic interpretation of man, society, and history, that confronts the conception of order in the society in which it arises, with the criteria of a critical knowledge of order."<sup>118</sup> The first thing to be noticed in this phrase is the characterization of political science as a "noetic" interpretation of man, society, and history, the word "noetic" being understood by Voegelin in

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 284; *CW*, Vol. 6, 342.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

the sense of classical philosophy. This term, which is connected with the differentiation of consciousness that we discussed earlier in the context of historiogenesis, will be discussed properly below. For the moment we shall draw attention to the remainder of the phrase, which indicates the proper position of the political scientist, according to Voegelin: he is to hold a critical stance towards the prevailing conception of order in society.

What interests us here is specifically the *approach* that the political scientist is to take in order that he may adopt a critical stance towards this phenomenon, *viz.*, the political society in which he lives. This is an approach in which *consciousness* plays a central part, as will be expounded below. This consideration essentially concerns the *method* that is to be employed here. We just saw that the approach taken by the natural sciences with regard to their respective objects of analysis (the concrete things of the natural world), is not appropriate to the phenomena that are proper to political science, which, on the contrary, has for its task the explication of political reality. But the political scientist finds that "at the time of his attempt the field is already occupied by other interpretations (*von anderer Seite besetzt*)."<sup>119</sup> That is, one cannot begin from a *tabula rasa* an analysis of

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

political society, for this object is always bound up with its own self-interpretation, unlike the inanimate objects that are taken by the natural sciences as their objects. This self-understanding of a political society is expressed in *symbols* that, to the political scientist, convey its *experience of order, i.e.,* its habitual mode of existence, particularly in its spiritual dimension. In this way, symbols are not mere "ideas" but constitute the expression of order experienced by a society in a given historical epoch, as we have seen. However, symbols of this sort Voegelin classifies as "non-noetic interpretations."<sup>120</sup> It would now be appropriate to explain the term "noetic" and its nominal form "noesis" in Voegelin's sense, an explanation that will come by way of an account of Voegelin's notion of the tension toward the ground of being.

### 3.1.2 Consciousness and Order

Voegelin notes that "noetic like non-noetic interpretations interpret the experience of order for the society," and further, "each interpretation claims that its is the only true one."<sup>121</sup> What is, then, the distinguishing feature of noetic interpretations of political society as

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 288; *CW*, Vol. 6, 346.

opposed to non-noetic ones? This, however, begs the question: what is a "noetic" interpretation of political society? An adequate response to these questions requires that we first explicate further Voegelin's notion of the "tension" toward the ground of being.

It might be appropriate beforehand to reiterate Voegelin's account of the place of consciousness in man's experience of political reality: "The consciousness of concrete men is the place in which order is experienced."<sup>122</sup> We have already encountered this formulation of the role of consciousness in the context of society, in the second part of this thesis: man's concrete experience of the order that is proper to the society in which he lives emerges in his consciousness, that is, in his awareness of his everyday life in the community. Accordingly, the individual consciousness is not understood as a mere abstraction, for it is in the *concrete existence* of human beings that societal order, experienced inwardly, is rendered manifest in daily life: it is through his *actions* that man expresses his engagement with what he consciously experiences within political society, this latter being infused with the order that governs it at the social level since men do not, indeed cannot, live in a state of chaos. Order, in some

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 287; *CW*, Vol. 6, 345.



form or another, is indeed a *sine qua non* of concrete social life, a point that we shall revisit below.

The individual consciousness, as the place where societal order is experienced, is characterized by a certain *tension*, of which we have already made mention: "The tension in political reality [...] must be traced back to its origin in the consciousness of men, who desire true knowledge of order."<sup>123</sup> Consciousness is the *origin* of the most fundamental tension of which man has the experience, that which concerns his origin and destiny. Societal order, it should be noted, is experienced by concrete men, but this order is not a "knowledge of an object, but itself a tension, insofar as man experiences his existence through the tension to the divine ground of his existence."<sup>124</sup> There are two main points in this passage that require explanation.

The first concerns the nature of the tension experienced by man in political society. The tension constitutes part of the *structure* of Voegelin's conception of consciousness. The tension is neither a determinate object (*Gegenstand*) which the individual might come upon in the course of his experience, nor one that he may hold himself apart from to "analyse" from afar as if he could

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<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

separate himself from it. For, "[t]he tension is neither an object, not its poles."<sup>125</sup> We may thus say that *in itself* the tension is devoid of any physical characteristics that would distinguish it as such by means of observation. The tension is not a thing nor anything else that is immanent to the world.

On the contrary, the non-objective character of the tension of existence constitutes "the intangible of reality" and "allows leeway for a multiplicity of modes of experience, symbolic expressions of the experience, which motivate a corresponding multiplicity of symbolic expressions of experience. In the dynamic of the struggles for true expression of order, we find the origin of the tension in political reality."<sup>126</sup> Thus in the tension of his own *existence*, as "ordered" by the political reality in which he exists, man can and does express, in a plurality of ways, in respect of the diversity of socio-cultural modes of living, this very order according to which a given society persists. These modes by which the tension of man's existence finds expression we hinted at earlier in terms of its non-noetic forms: mythic, theological, gnostic, etc. We shall return to this point later in the context of societal loss of reality.

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 287-88; *CW*, Vol. 6, 346.

The other important point in the phrase cited earlier concerns the "divine ground" towards which the tension of existence is directed. It might seem strange *prima facie* that the existential tension be directed *towards* something outside of itself, *i.e.*, towards something external to consciousness. Indeed, the German *Spannung*, like the English "tension," is generally understood as a property of a given "object" and does not normally have a directional connotation. The unusual sense of the word is, in Voegelin's thought, related to the non-objective character of the tension: it is not a physical thing towards which the individual might orient himself or from which he might take his bearings.<sup>127</sup>

On the contrary, it is in the context of man's apparent dereliction in the world (in the sense of K. Jaspers' notion of "foundering") that the tension is to be understood. The tension here, internal to consciousness, is towards the divine ground of the existence of man, *i.e.*, in

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<sup>127</sup> Voegelin addressed this issue in a letter to his friend, the literary critic, Robert Heilman, dated June 3, 1976: "I am a bit at a loss to understand why the philosophical meaning of *tension*, which stresses the directional factor in the existential tension, should cause such difficulty? Especially since the cognitive direction of consciousness is covered by the related term *intentionality*. The abstract *tension* was formed in antiquity to cover such concrete cases of tension as love, hope, and faith; and even more generally, the directional tension of matter toward the form that is fit for it. For Plato and Aristotle, this tension of existence manifests itself concretely in the 'quest,' the 'search,' the 'questioning' and 'inquiring' of the thinker in the direction of the ground of his existence that is, at the same time, the 'mover' of the inquiry and the 'drawer' of the soul toward its immortality." Robert B. Heilman and Eric Voegelin: *A Friendship in Letters, 1944-1984* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 281.

regards to the question of his existence in the world, indeed to the very mystery of there being a world at all. The cause of man's ultimate origin is thus not to be understood as immanent to the world, nor to his particular political society, but rather as transcendent with respect to it. Man's situation in political reality is that of a mystery: he exists in the world but is incapable of grasping with certainty the why and wherefore of his existence, as we saw earlier. His origin and destiny are not disclosed to him, yet he must act, in political society, in view of this condition. Unlike the animals, who have recourse to instinct, man finds himself compelled, as Gehlen says, not merely to live, but to lead his life. In the social context of political society this necessity finds a multiplicity of expressions and attitudes that man may take towards his existence. In view of this situation we shall continue our discussion of consciousness in "*Was ist Politische Realität?*," turning now to the properly noetic forms of expression by which the experience of the tension might manifest itself.

Voegelin says: "Noetic interpretations arise if consciousness, for whatever reason, attempts to become explicit to itself. The undertaking of consciousness, to

interpret its own *logos*, we wish to call noetic exegesis."<sup>128</sup> The "logos" that Voegelin refers to here does connote mere speech as such, but rather man's reasoning and his capacity to exercise this function with regard to his political reality. Like Aristotle, whose idea of man we surveyed in the first part, Voegelin finds in man's reason a crucial component of his being. But for Voegelin, man's *logos* is explicitly related to his effort to situate himself with respect to the *ground* of his existence, for by means of his rationality he may become aware of the tension of his existence in that he might inquire as to the why and wherefore of his own being, as we saw in Scheler, which to man is not disclosed and hence remains a mystery.

We have said that the ground of man's being in the world is absent and that man consequently finds himself in a state of dereliction. This state of existence is one of being "conscious in the tension of the In-Between (*der Zwischenreiches*) (metaxy)," in which the "divine and human participate in each other."<sup>129</sup> Thus man *participates* in the divine through his position in the "metaxy", that is, from his position in the cosmos between man and God, a participatory relation that is accessible to man's

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 288; *CW*, Vol. 6, 346.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

consciousness. The nature of this participation will now be examined more closely.

Man participates in the divine by virtue of his *reason*. He must recognize the finite condition of his existence, *i.e.*, the fact that he does not know his origin nor his destiny, but ought to desire this cosmological knowledge of the ground of his existence. Thus Voegelin says: "Aristotle frames (*überbaut*) the exegesis of noetic desire toward the ground and of the being-drawn (*Angezogen-Werdens*) by it with the symbol of participation (*metalepsis*) of two so-called *Nous*-entities in each other."<sup>130</sup> The Greek *nous* (mind, reason) demands of man that his participation in the divine, although the latter cannot be manifest to him (as might a physical object), be accompanied by a *desire* (*Begehren*) to know this ground of his existence. The *nous* thus expresses "both the human capacity for the knowing quest for the ground of being itself, which is experienced as the direction-indicating mover of the quest."<sup>131</sup> *Nous* is thus understood here as man's capacity to question as to the ground of his existence in political society; but this implies an acknowledgement on his part that he does not in fact know or claim to know the answer to this question.

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 290; *CW*, Vol.6, 347.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3.1.3 The Approach to Political Reality

Throughout this second part of the thesis we have been making reference to the symbols according to which a political society understands itself. We may now add that the political scientist is to adopt a critical stance towards the reality in which he exists, that is, political society. How would he go about doing this? Voegelin's view on this may be discerned through his distinction between "compact" and "differentiated" consciousness, which we covered in the previous part.

The noetic understanding that man is capable of striving after through inquiry into the ground of his being would be a "noetic exegesis," Voegelin says, that

Engenders historically the tension toward the ground as the focal point of order or differentiated consciousness, as opposed to a pre-knowledge of man and his order, that stems from the compact primary experience of the cosmos and its [mythical] expression. It is a differentiated corrective to the compact pre-knowledge, but does not replace it.<sup>132</sup>

As we saw near the beginning of this paper, consciousness is the place (*Ort*) in which the order is experienced; this order is that which is proper to the society in which the individual lives, irrespective of time or geographical location. In this respect consciousness might be said to be a gauge or barometer of the order of a given society: if

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*; *CW*, Vol. 6, 348.

the order, according to which a society is centred, is based on the fundamentally unknown divine ground of man's being, a situation in which man must utilize his rationality, and not on a ground that is immanent to the world, e.g., an arbitrarily determined biological "foundation," the political reality that derives from this conception of order in society will be fundamentally different from one that stems from the divine ground.

Now, the order that is proper to any society is experienced according to what Voegelin calls its "compact" experience; in the last passage cited, it is this same mode of experience that is called the societal "Vor-Wissen," or "pre-(noetic) knowledge" that a society has of itself. This is the same as what Voegelin calls the "cosmic primary experience" of man in society, which we explained in the second part, an experience that constitutes the pre-noetically explicated knowledge that man has of himself, for at this stage individual consciousness has not yet progressed far enough to make the distinction between "compact" and "differentiated" experience.<sup>133</sup> As we saw,

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<sup>133</sup> It should be noted here that for Voegelin there is no "collective consciousness": *"Das Konkrete Bewußtsein des konkreten Menschen ist das einzige, von dem wir erfahrung haben. Konstruktionen eines Kollektivbewußtseins – sei es eines Bewußtseins der Gesellschaft oder eines Bewußtseins der Menschheit in der Geschichte – sind Hypostasen, denen kein Status in der Theorie eingeräumt werden kann."* (342). Any theory of political society has to do only with individual men; indeed, they can and do act collectively in a political context; however, any analysis of men in political society must be rooted inwardly in the



noetic understanding (or differentiation of consciousness) turns on the individual's striving after the ground of his being, which also requires that this individual recognize that he does not in fact know what this ground is and that there is a limit to what he can and does know.

We have already made reference to compact consciousness and its modes of expression, which are non-noetic: ideological, theological, gnostic, and most fundamentally, *mythic*. The individual who inquires as to the ground of his being comes to question the prevailing compactly articulated experience of reality while retaining the noetic standpoint from which he questions the societal self-understanding: "Even when the noetic exegesis, coming from more compact experiences of the domain of reality, differentiates its logos, it continues itself to belong to this same domain of reality. The myth reaches into the noetic exegesis, because the noesis reaches the myth as it recognizes the logos of the latter."<sup>134</sup> This movement whereby man progresses from compact to noetic or differentiated experience is to be achieved through a fundamental change in the individual's consciousness of political society: "The reality of consciousness is not unconscious, but relates, in differentiated degrees of luminosity, visual-

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consciousness of particular individuals towards this society as outwardly manifest in their actions.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 292; *CW*, Vol. 6, 350.

expressively to reality, either to its own reality of participation, or to the termini of participation [*i.e.*, the divine and the world-immanent]".<sup>135</sup> That is, consciousness constitutes a *process* in which it develops, gaining in "luminosity" (*Helle*), *i.e.*, rational clarity, in terms of its understanding, not of "society" in general but of the particular society in which that individual lives.

Voegelin's contrast between compact and differentiated consciousness relates concretely to both myth, mentioned above, and his view of the work of the political scientist *vis-à-vis* his society. We discussed the phenomenon of "myth" earlier in section 2.1.2. Here we said that myths, in particular those of a religious nature (e.g. the Fall in the Christian context), constitute explanations of transfinite process, *i.e.* explanations of that which transcends the birth and death of individuals; their earthly existence and that of entire civilizations may be accounted for by the historiogenetic "tales" explained in 2.2.2. We may now add that myths in this sense are by no means mere fictions, but explanatory *stories* concerning social and political order. As such, myths constitute the basis of a society's self-interpretation or self-understanding, because they are stories that a society *tells itself about itself*. For Voegelin, the attentive

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 307; *CW*, Vol.6, 365.

political scientist would address himself in a particular manner regarding this phenomenon at the social level.

This political scientist (*qua* concrete, conscious individual) ought, as we said, to approach society and its self-interpretation with a *critical* attitude. Earlier it was noted that noetic or differentiated experience, *i.e.*, that which is characterized by consciousness of the tension toward the ground of being, exists neither in the abstract nor apart from the society in which it finds itself. In this context, the noetic or differentiated consciousness finds itself in a particular relationship to the compact consciousness and its mode of being, which is indicative of society's self-understanding. As noted at the beginning of this part, political science demands that consciousness be engaged in a "critical debate" (*Auseinandersetzung*) with the societal conception of order; this stance requires a "relation of tension to the self-interpretation of society". From this confrontational relationship, comes the "starting-point for a process of differentiation, in which the noetic interpretation can become a "science," which relates itself to political reality as its object."<sup>136</sup> Thus, in the *relationship* between noetically differentiated consciousness and society's self-interpretation as compactly understood lies the critical approach to

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 285; *CW*, Vol. 6, 343.

political reality (as understood in the *Mythenbild*), which is properly the object of political science, as we said at the beginning of this part of the thesis.

We have emphasized throughout that Voegelin is always concerned with consciousness in the concrete sense. Thus: "Consciousness is not a free-floating something, but always the concrete consciousness of the concrete man," and is "always grounded on man's bodily existence, by which he belongs to the entire realm of being from the inorganic up to the animal."<sup>137</sup> Consequently, "in the corporeal aspect of man is his social existence grounded."<sup>138</sup> Clearly echoing Scheler here, Voegelin notes that man is not merely consciousness, but rather participates in all modes of being that are proper to himself: (1) the inorganic, plant, and animal as well as (2) the rational that is proper to human consciousness. All these components make up part of the political reality that is the object of investigation in political science; consequently, the work of the individual who acts in political reality would be defective if it neglects any of these components of being.

From the concrete reality of the political community, of which the political scientist is a part, would arise a theory of politics that is fully legitimate in Voegelin's

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 340; *CW*, Vol. 6, 398.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

view. Thus he is clear that a failure to take account of the proper object of political science, *i.e.*, man in political society in all of his dimensions (conscious and bodily), results in investigations that are "symptoms of a disease, in which pneumopathological phenomena [indicative] of a loss of reality are to be recognized."<sup>139</sup> Thus it is the *loss of reality* that becomes the proper concern of political science according to Voegelin. We reiterate that, according to Voegelin, such an undertaking is to be conducted not primarily on the basis of empirical data (*e.g.*, as would be modelled on the empirical sciences), but on the basis of *noesis* - the critical engagement of the individual with his society in the prevailing political context. For Voegelin, if man's power of reasoning, which we saw to be a vital constituent of his being in the fully comprehensive sense, is disregarded in the context of political reality, this situation may well signal, for this political society, the loss of reality, which is the subject of the final section of this thesis.

### 3.2 Loss of Reality

In the second paragraph of *The New Science of Politics*, Voegelin remarks that "[i]n an hour of crisis,

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 341; *CW*, Vol. 6, 399.

when the order of a society flounders and disintegrates, the fundamental problems of political existence in history are more apt to come into view than in periods of comparative stability."<sup>140</sup> The phenomenon that we were just describing, viz., what Voegelin calls the "loss of reality" for a society, would connote such a disintegration of order. An examination of certain concrete instantiations of this phenomenon may not only serve to illustrate it adequately, but also to demonstrate Voegelin's argument regarding the importance of an appropriate philosophical anthropology for political science.

### 3.2.1 Voegelin's Critique of Race Theory

Voegelin's employment of the philosophical anthropological tradition in analysing concrete political phenomena by no means appeared only in his later works, but was present even in his early writings, in particular in his books dealing with European racism and the race theories that underpinned this phenomenon. While still living in Austria, Voegelin wrote and published two books nearly simultaneously in the early 1930's, *Rasse und Staat* (*Race and State*) and *Die Geschichte der Rassenidee in der Geistesgeschichte von Ray bis Carus* (*The History of the Race Idea*). These sought to analyse critically the

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<sup>140</sup> Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 1-2.

aforementioned race theories, then widespread in the German-speaking world, where they of course found their concrete political manifestation in this same decade.

Indeed, he who reads these books, which were promptly banned (with Voegelin being blacklisted by the Nazis upon the *Anschluss* of Germany with Austria), would not be surprised at this political outcome for the philosopher. For the aim of the books was to subject the predominantly German race theories to a rigorous analytical examination, which concluded with their repudiation on the grounds of incoherence. It will not be attempted here, however, to set forth an expository analysis of these works, for contributions in this regard have already been achieved<sup>141</sup>, and moreover this issue does not directly touch on our problem. Rather, we shall focus on Voegelin's employment of philosophical anthropology in his critique of race theory in the context of concrete political phenomena.

We may start by noting that Voegelin was initially interested in philosophical anthropology because "the roots of the state must be sought in the nature of man," a task that requires the development of "the problems of

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<sup>141</sup> See esp. T. Heilke, *Voegelin on the Idea of Race: An Analysis of Modern European Racism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990).

*Staatslehre* on the basis of a philosophical anthropology."<sup>142</sup>

Thus, even at this stage Voegelin saw that a theory of politics had to include a comprehensive theory of man, *i.e.*, a philosophical anthropology.<sup>143</sup> The word "comprehensive" is the operative one here, for the race "theories" of the time were certainly not complete expositions of man's nature. It should be remarked, furthermore, that it is the *social domain* in which "ideas" pertaining to man, such as those of the race theorists, arise and are legitimized by the community; this phenomenon is at the centre of Voegelin's concerns, an occupation that would later emerge in his analysis of the symbolization of experiences and then again in his explication of historiogenetic myth. Hence his rejection of "pure," or

<sup>142</sup> Voegelin, *Race and State*, in K. Vondung, ed., *CW*, Vol. 2, tr. Ruth Hein (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 2.

<sup>143</sup> This is not to say that the existing theories were yet applicable to politics: "But in Germany today a theory on the nature of man is only just emerging, and in spite of outstanding work by Max Scheler, Helmuth Plessner, Bernhard Groethuysen, Karl Jaspers, and Martin Heidegger, the ideas of these thinkers cannot be applied directly to the race problem because they arose from quite different philosophical impulses and must first be subjected to a thorough restructuring in order to be fruitful for the concrete field of race theory." (*Ibid.*, 9.)

It is particularly on this matter and at this stage in the development of Voegelin's thought that Scheler's influence on Voegelin most explicitly shows itself. As Voegelin says in his *Autobiographical Reflections*, "I adopted at the time [*i.e.* the late 1920s and early 1930s] the philosophical anthropology of Max Scheler, as expressed in his recent publication *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*," a work which "proved sufficient for analysing the race problem." (Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, in E. Sandoz ed., *CW*, Vol. 34 [Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006], pp. 66-67). Yet, as we have sought to demonstrate throughout the present essay, the influence of Scheler and philosophical anthropology on Voegelin's thought ought not to be attributed to any particular period of its development, but rather extends throughout the body of his work, as may be seen in the Voegelinian preoccupation with the essential and immutable constitution of human being.



abstract, theories, be they those of his former law professor Hans Kelsen or Husserl's phenomenology: they fail to reach the concrete social environment that is at the roots of politics, a domain the analysis of which demands a complete understanding of man.

Hence, Voegelin begins his *History of the Race Idea* with the words: "The knowledge of man is out of joint. Current race theory is characterized by uncertainty about what is essential and a decline in the technical ability to grasp it cognitively."<sup>144</sup> These lines hint at the methodological underpinnings of the investigation: Voegelin is examining contemporary "theories" of man on the basis of their capacity to grasp what is *essential* in him. Now, we may recall from the start of our discussion of philosophical anthropology as a discipline (in 1.1.1), that it seeks to discover this same essence of man. Most significantly in our researches, we found in Scheler's thought a composite image on man, who participates in all levels of being from inorganic to divine. The race theories, on the other hand, present the "*isolation* of one part, considered uniquely human, from all other parts constituting the whole human being," a "construction" that "defines as human only that part which must be recognized

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<sup>144</sup> Voegelin, *The History of the Race Idea*, in K. Vondung, ed., *CW*, Vol. 3, tr. Ruth Hein (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 3.

as uniquely human, differentiating human being from other forms of being."<sup>145</sup> The sole part of human being that the race theories selected is the corporeal element, according to which the category of "race" is supposed to determine social position within a given community.

Thus, a racist approach to the problem of the existence of man in political society could only meet with Voegelin's censure, not because it affronts any social consensus on "equality," but because it is based on a woefully incomplete and thus distorted conception of man. For, in the "biological theory" of racial differences, "the 'explanation' consists in the reduction of the phenomenon of man to a phenomenon of a lower level, such as animal or inorganic matter"; but this is untenable because man, "as spiritual-bodily historical substance cannot be 'explained' through something that is less than man himself."<sup>146</sup> Indeed, the race theories that Voegelin is here writing against reduce man, whose being spans all levels from inorganic to divine, to the biological-animal level at which these theories operate, in this way rendering him well beneath the full range of his being in which he, in reality, participates.

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<sup>145</sup> Voegelin, *Race and State*, 23.

<sup>146</sup> Voegelin, *The History of the Race Idea*, 24.

### 3.2.2 The German Attempt to "Master the Past"

In the preceding section we have attempted to show how, in Voegelin's hands, the discipline of philosophical anthropology can indeed be very relevant to social criticism bearing on the concrete socio-political sphere that lies in the domain of political science. Whereas we just demonstrated Voegelin's application of philosophical anthropology to this concrete domain in his early work, it will now be shown how Voegelin continued to utilize this tradition in this capacity in his later work, specifically in his consideration of Germany's confrontation with its Nazi past.

Voegelin's analysis of the social level (*i.e.* that which constitutes the foundation of all political institutions) reveals that, on his view, a certain critical attitude is required for the maintenance of the political community and thus to prevent the loss of political reality, which includes, as we have discussed, the divine ground of being. This phenomenon of the loss of reality we mentioned briefly in section 3.1.3. Here we noted that, for Voegelin, a theory of politics is to investigate problems of political disorder in society, particularly concerning "pneumopathological phenomena" indicating a "loss of

reality," or "the darkening of sectors of reality."<sup>147</sup> These phenomena, to be sure, are not to be most fundamentally located in society's institutions nor in its laws. The object of the political scientist, according to Voegelin, ought to be the order according to which the society lives, which manifests itself in the consciousness of individuals in political society. This order and thus its expression in language symbols ought to be guided by reason, or *Nous*, as we discussed. This reality is expressed "in the structure of the psyche of a man who is attuned to the divine order in the cosmos, not of a man who exists in revolt against it."<sup>148</sup>

In this relationship,

Reason has the definite existential content of openness toward reality in the sense in which Bergson speaks of *l'âme ouverte*. If the content of the classic analysis is ignored and the symbols "Nous" and "Reason" are treated as if they referred to some human faculty independent from the tension toward the ground, the empirical basis from which the symbols derive their validity is lost; they become abstracts from nothing, and the vacuum of the pseudoabstracts is ready to be filled with various nonrational contents.<sup>149</sup>

Voegelin's mention of the French philosopher H. Bergson is in no way irrelevant to the present discussion on the role of the political scientist, according to Voegelin. For

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<sup>147</sup> Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 341; *CW*, Vol. 6, 399.

<sup>148</sup> Voegelin, "Reason: The Classic Experience," in *CW*, Vol. 12, 273.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 273-74.

Bergson develops a certain conception of the relation between the individual and his society that is very pertinent to Voegelin's view of the role of the political scientist in political society.

According to Bergson, the two dimensions of human life that hold the individual members of a society together are morality and religion, which can sometimes oppose each other. For there can be a "closed" society and an "open" one: the former has the attitude "of an individual and of a society turned toward each other (*recourbé sur eux-mêmes*). Individual and society at the same time (*à la fois*), the soul turns in a circle. It is closed."<sup>150</sup> This is so because, in Voegelin's sense, the individual's attitudes are very closely linked to his society's self-interpretation.

On the other hand, the "form" of the "open" soul "does not depend on its content," which would include those mythic symbols by which society interprets itself.<sup>151</sup> Thus the "open" soul "would embrace, in principle, all of humanity."<sup>152</sup> The individual in this case would have to draw on principles of a *universal* nature, notably those which stem from reason or religion, that would "break" or exceed the "circle" that binds the individual to his society. This

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<sup>150</sup> Henri Bergson, *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1932), 34. My translation from the French.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

implies a *critical* relationship on the part of the individual to his society, which requires the exercise of his reason. Hence Voegelin says that "we can characterize what Bergson called the openness of the soul, as its rationality," as opposed to "the self-closing against the ground [...] as irrationality."<sup>153</sup> How did these phenomena manifest themselves in post-war German society such that they would become the object of critique for Voegelin?

In 1964, Voegelin delivered a series of lectures at the University of Munich on this subject, later entitled "*Hitler and the Germans*," which have much to do with the "loss of reality" and with the nature of man. One of the persistent themes in these lectures is that of the dedivinization and dehumanization of man, of which the problem of the loss of reality is a corollary.

Voegelin says in these lectures that the problem of loss of reality is intimately connected with the *mystery* of human existence (discussed earlier) and the experience of man in political society in relation to his condition in the world. According to this thesis, "[r]eason and spirit are the two modes of constitution of man, which were generalized as the idea of man," the former being a "discovery" of Hellenic society, the latter's realization

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<sup>153</sup> Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 289; *CW*, Vol. 6, 347.

arising from Israelite societies.<sup>154</sup> That is to say: the particular idea of man, as symbolically expressed in these societies, constitutes the source of Western society and culture, notably through the influence of the Greeks and that of Christianity (including their respective ideas of man, as discussed at the start of this thesis).

Man thus exists as constituted by the two sources of reason and spirit, which means that he "does not exist from himself," but "from an already given world."<sup>155</sup> The origin of man and that of the world in which he lives are not of his own making, yet he is present in the world. This "givenness" of the world and of the existence of man, which from man's position in the present cannot be accounted for since this origin is not disclosed in his experience, is consequently "a mystery, and the name for the mystery, in which man is existentially involved, is referred to as 'God.'"<sup>156</sup> Thus, man's relation to the divine from his position in the world takes the form of a seeking for the "ground of being in the sense of a first cause," and in this way "man participates in the divine."<sup>157</sup> This relation to the divine is rendered possible, as we saw, through two paths: the rational, in the sense of the philosophical

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<sup>154</sup> Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, tr. Detlev Clemens and Brendan Purcell (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 86.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-7.

seeking; and the spiritual, which is to say "pneumatically through hearing the Word in the sense of revelation."<sup>158</sup>

The deviation of man from this relationship to the divine, of which the social and political events of Nazi Germany is a sign, "takes the form of a loss of dignity", which "comes about through the denial of the participation in the divine," which in turn constitutes the "dedivinizing of man"; and because man participates in the divine, he may be said to be "theomorphic" by nature — thus in the form of God, so that the dedivinizing "is always followed by a dehumanizing."<sup>159</sup> The dedivinizing here is thus the "consequence of a deliberate closing of oneself to the divine."<sup>160</sup>

The exclusion of the divine from human affairs brings about a "loss of reality, insofar as this divine being, this ground of being, is indeed reality too."<sup>161</sup> From this point, the divine no longer constitutes the ground of man's being in the world; instead, man himself emerges as "the creator of the world."<sup>162</sup> Man thus eliminates the possibility of transcendence of the given world of experience, such that "the reality of man is put in the place of the lost

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.



divine reality."<sup>163</sup> What results from this ontological *Ersatz* is that man loses the awareness of his place in the *metaxy*, or his place of being *in-between* the terrestrial sphere and the divine. According to Voegelin, this historical development carries great consequences, particularly for the Germany of the Nazi period.

In these Munich lectures, Voegelin develops two main consequences of the loss of reality, the first of which is that of "stupidity". It is important to note that for Voegelin, stupidity "shall mean here that a man, because of his loss of reality, is not in a position to rightly orient his action in the world, in which he lives."<sup>164</sup> We have stressed throughout man's participation in the divine for Voegelin. However, "when the central organ for guiding his action, his theomorphic nature and openness towards reason and spirit, has ceased functioning, then he will act stupidly."<sup>165</sup> Thus the word is not used by Voegelin, in this context, as an insult or otherwise as a "term of abuse," but rather to characterize the actions of individuals as a consequence or symptom of living with a loss of reality.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-100. Voegelin adds here that "when stupidity occurs as a term of abuse and the differentiating articulation of the problematic is not mastered, then there appears a panic-like behavior in which it is precisely oneself who is stupid, because one no longer masters the situation, nor can articulate it. (*Ibid.*, 100). The problem of

The second consequence of the loss of reality concerns *language*, in that man loses the ability to *express* his situation adequately in the world of experience: "if I have lost certain sectors of reality from my range of experience, I will also be lacking the language for appropriately characterizing them."<sup>167</sup> In the context of Voegelin's third lecture, this notion will take on some importance, as will be shown; thus we signal its appearance in the second lecture, in order that its connection to the loss of reality be retained.

The themes that we have discussed up to this point recur in the third lecture and underlie Voegelin's argumentation throughout it. The first subject of discussion here is the Austrian writer Robert Musil, and in particular his essay "On Stupidity". Here, Musil makes a distinction that Voegelin draws on to explain the "modern concretizations" of the phenomenon of "stupidity", which he understands as the inability of man to rightly orient himself in the world owing to a loss of reality.<sup>168</sup>

The usefulness of Musil's work on the notion of stupidity for Voegelin seems to be that he differentiates the term according to the individual's behavior within a

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"articulation" in the context of "illiteracy" is discussed briefly below.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 98; see also *ibid.*, 89, previously cited.

given *social context*, and not primarily as an insult or designation of incompetence. A general definition does not suffice for characterizing the behavior of individuals in society, least of all that of Nazi-era Germany, because it ignores the social context: for example, "[i]n a situation of disorder and chaos, qualities such as cunning, craftiness, and violence are indeed necessary in order to preserve one's life and to prevail"; but these same qualities would be a symptom of stupidity within society "because a man who behaves in this way will be socially boycotted."<sup>169</sup> Thus, "one must differentiate stupidity according to the types of performance that are normally required in the society."<sup>170</sup>

This differentiation is apparent in Musil's distinction between "honorable, or simple, stupidity" and "higher, or intelligent, stupidity".<sup>171</sup> The former form of "stupidity" applies to everyday, common and honourable people, which Voegelin calls a mere "lack of understanding."<sup>172</sup> By contrast, "intelligent stupidity" refers to a "disturbance in the equilibrium of the spirit. The spirit now becomes the adversary, not the mind."<sup>173</sup> In other words, with the intelligent stupidity it is not at

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<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

all a question of the level of intelligence, but of the order in the individual's spirit or soul, in the sense of Plato's idea of man.

To clarify, Voegelin says that "this condition of higher stupidity is not a spiritual sickness in the sense of psychopathology, but something quite different," namely *pneumopathology*, a concept that we discussed earlier. "This means that the spirit is sick, not the soul in the sense of psychopathology."<sup>174</sup> Just as psychopathology takes as its object mental illness or impairment, which might be diagnosed and treated through empirical methods, so spiritual sickness requires a completely different approach.<sup>175</sup> For understanding the spiritual sickness prevailing in Germany at the time in terms of psychopathology would exclude from the analysis elements pertaining to the social context.

Voegelin says this is the case in the contemporary German historian Percy Schramm's book *Hitlers Tischgespräche*, in which Schramm writes extensively about Hitler's "aura" - his "deep blue" eyes, beard, and shaving habits - but excluding precisely what is of significance to

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<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> In particular here, we might recall from the previous section Voegelin's discussion on method in political science: whereas the empirical sciences are suitable for the application of axiomatic principles, political science, whose object of analysis is the human being in society, cannot reliably avail itself of this approach.

the problem of Germany under the Nazis. Voegelin takes this as a symptom of the prevailing spiritual sickness, which, as we have noted, stems from the loss of reality. The problem here is "the triviality of the enumerated facts established in relation to what is relevant. Schramm suffers from a serious distortion of relevance, a distortion of the contact with reality."<sup>176</sup> Thus a figure such as Schramm may be seen as an instance of "illiteracy", the term by which Voegelin designates the inability of man to use the appropriate language in articulating himself due to his loss of reality. For it is precisely a pertinent and cogent account of Hitler in the *social context* of Nazi Germany that Schramm fails to execute; indeed, Schramm writes that "we are dealing with Hitler, with Hitler only."<sup>177</sup>

It is in connection with the social context of Nazi Germany, ignored by Schramm, that Voegelin addresses a further symptom of the loss of reality, in his discussion of the German writer Carl Amery, in particular the latter's account of the eclipse of the primary virtues (those which constitute morality) by "bourgeois propriety," in the sense of the German notion of *Anstand*, or decency and good manners. From bourgeois propriety, however, morality may

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<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

easily be excluded: one may "appear punctually for service in the priest's house or in the Gestapo cellar [...] I can wash my hands after an honest day's work in the cornfield or after my activities in the crematorium of the concentration camp."<sup>178</sup> In this way, *Anstand* may be seen to have superseded the moral virtues which are constitutive of morality, because whereas the supremacy of the moral virtues "is obvious at the commonsense level," it is "only at this peculiar petit bourgeois sphere of 'propriety' that they will never be understood."<sup>179</sup> The problem of the reversal of virtues in this case must, for Voegelin, be understood in terms of the society, and in particular its spiritual condition and the way by which individuals understand themselves in relation to the world and the "ground of being" of man concerning his orientation in the world.

Thus Voegelin says that the problem here "is always in the structure of the society—how a society can be so organized that these peculiar kinds of simplicity and stupidity will not become politically effective, let alone become socially dominant and determine the society"<sup>180</sup>; this is, of course, what did happen to German society in the Nazi period. The structure of society can thus become such

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<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-4.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

that an inversion of virtues is generally adopted due to disorder arising within this society, both at the social and individual levels, so that even the simple and honest man will adopt this inversion of virtues at the expense of the traditional moral ones.

This condition of inversion of virtues is thus a pneumopathic illness, indicative of the loss of reality. Here, two realities are produced: "the first reality, where the normally ordered man lives, and the second reality, in which the pneumatically disturbed man now lives and which thus comes into constant conflict with the first reality."<sup>181</sup> This condition, in which the society is split into two realities, is the result of the loss of reality experienced in a society in a state of disorder.

Such phenomena constitute part of a broader subject of discussion for Voegelin in the lectures: that of the Germans' post-war attempts to reconcile themselves to the Nazi epoch in their history, which is an attempt to "master the past" (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*). But for Voegelin, history cannot be mastered as if it were an external object, and moreover, the past is no longer, Hence it is a question of mastering the present, under which "there is a virtue to be understood," namely that "of placing the present of immanent time under the judgement of the

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<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

presence under God."<sup>182</sup> From the foregoing the implications of this statement becomes evident: man is not to be taken as the final judge of human action, but societal order requires man to subject his judgement to the divine, insofar as he recognizes the transcendent character of the truth of order.

In order to preclude such a loss of reality, Voegelin says, social criticism is necessary:

what will be called political science arises in the critique of time in the sense of the empirically immanent society that does not place itself under the judgement in the presence of God. That is to say, the science of the order of man in society arises from the reaction against not existing in the present.<sup>183</sup>

To aim at mastering the past is vain; the past was once a present. It is man's attention to and criticism of social and political order in the present that is required, but in the recognition that true knowledge of order is not in man's disposition.

In this section we have been concerned with the position that the political scientist, according to Voegelin, ought to take towards the political society in which he finds himself. Because the society is indeed the basis of state institutions, as we noted earlier, those

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<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-72.



phenomena which might be indicative of a loss of reality in Voegelin's sense would be found in this sphere. To be sure, when we speak of a "loss of reality" in this sense, we are not referring merely to the concrete, physical world, but also to the those segments of human being which constitute man's capacity to think and act rationally in the context of political society. "Reality," and certainly no less the political reality with which man is continually engaged, comprises the totality of modes of being that constitute human being, for in all these modes (animal, vegetable, human, divine) he participates in living his life in the community.

We recall Voegelin's designation of political reality as the proper object of inquiry in the discipline of political science (3.1.1), and that this object and its deformation cannot be rightly approached without the appropriate "diagnostic tools." For this object is not a mere thing, but the community of which the individual, including the political scientist, is a constituent. Understood in this sense, *i.e.* in its relation to the community, the political scientist (and particularly the political "theorist") might risk involving himself in a deformation of political reality if the diversity of modes of human being were not respected in his analyses.

For Voegelin, political science is to constitute, in the tradition of the Greeks, an *episteme politike*, a true knowledge of things political, *i.e.*, of that which concerns the political community. We also saw in this section that for Voegelin the political scientist is to engage himself critically with the society's self-interpretation, or its compact consciousness of itself that expresses itself primarily in myth, or the meaningful stories that a community tells itself about itself. Thus it is not merely the institutions with which the political scientist would grapple, but also with the discourses that underlie them and their activities.

In the concrete cases discussed in the previous section of this part (European racism and Germany's understanding of its Nazi past), Voegelin discerned a certain loss of reality in that particular sectors of man's being were disregarded at the social level. In each case the loss of reality manifested itself by a loss of man's most important faculties for life in political society: his rationality and his participation in the divine. The results of this loss might be outwardly indicated by actions belying a contradiction of moral principles; or those which express a dogmatic and intractable adherence to a given ideology or cause. We drew from our Bergsonian

excursion the importance, shared by Voegelin, of an "open" soul on the part of the political commentator, such that this latter does not passively accommodate the unexamined compact-mythic experience that is proper to his society, but actively and critically confronts it with the faculties of his multi-faceted rational and spiritual nature. In this way might man, in this existence in political society, attune himself to his political reality in order that he act to hinder its loss.

## CONCLUSION

We noted in the introduction Voegelin's insistence that the philosopher of politics have an *idea of man* in order that his analyses be relevant to political reality. In keeping with Voegelin's concerns, our objective has been to furnish an explanation of the notion of philosophical anthropology in Voegelin's thought, particularly as it relates to his conception of politics and to the role of the political scientist in relation to the society in which he finds himself embedded. Therefore, let us now attempt to sum up the results of the foregoing investigation by recapitulating the steps by which we have achieved the goal as set out at the start.

We began the present essay with an account of the tradition that is known as "philosophical anthropology," with the purpose not only of explaining the intentions and aims of it, but also of highlighting those elements within it that most account for its importance according to Voegelin. Briefly, philosophical anthropology is concerned with the *essence* of man: those eternal, immutable qualities that are unique to him and that, for that reason, decisively distinguish him from animal life. On the one hand, the major "traditional" anthropologies, *i.e.*, the

Greek and the Christian, respectively determined this distinguishing mark in man, we saw, to be his rationality and his participation in the divine. On the other hand, modern contributions to the discipline, represented most substantially by Gehlen, Plessner, and, especially for our purposes, Scheler, tend to find man's most characteristic traits in the relationship he maintains towards his environment as distinct from that maintained by animals. Scheler's philosophy, in particular, because he stresses the divine element in man and his capacity to wonder about the origins of his existence, we found to be the most pertinent to, and the strongest influence on, Voegelin's own philosophical anthropology.

The Schelerian analysis of the relation of man to his natural environment may thus be said to find its extension, and application to the political realm, in the thought of Voegelin. Indeed, the influence of Scheler's anthropology on Voegelin's political thought might be seen in Scheler's method, which we indicated above. This we showed to be fundamentally *phenomenological*, in that it is oriented to the subjective, or inner, sphere of living beings, as inferred from the phenomenal manifestation (section 1.2.2).

Voegelin's attitude to Husserl's own phenomenology, however, we showed to be deeply adverse: it was not seen by

Voegelin as appropriate to the political environment, as it were. Lacking in Husserl's theory of consciousness was not only a philosophical anthropology, an idea of man that pertains to his activity in the concrete world, but also a adequately comprehensive conception of history. The philosopher who would approach political phenomena, *i.e.*, concrete individuals living in community in a given place and time within the structure of a state, must draw on all the evidence necessary to a fully comprehensive analysis; Husserl's theory of consciousness does not meet this requirement.

The alternative to Husserl's model of consciousness Voegelin formulated by amplifying the relationship between man and world to a far greater scale than that which is present in Husserl (as we showed in section 2.1.1). Consciousness is not "pure" but concrete, comprising many levels of being: inorganic, vegetative, animal, and divine, this latter level in particular linking Voegelin's philosophy of consciousness to his later philosophy of history. The presence of the divine in man, as signified by his capacity for transcendence, *i.e.*, his ability to think, or represent to himself, the beyond of the world of direct experience. The "objects" of consciousness are thus not merely those that are material; they also include those

that are transcendent to human experience, and thus exceed the bounds of his possible knowledge. The recognition that human certitude does in fact have definite limits, and to respect these boundaries accordingly, would be to acknowledge the inherent *mystery* of human existence.

On the broader social level, civilizations have responded to the fundamentally mysterious character of human existence in *myths*, which articulate the position of man in the cosmos, *i.e.*, the realm of being, in both existent and non-existent modes. We pointed out the two main paths by which man, according to Voegelin, becomes cognizant of his position in this regard: religion and philosophy, the former grasped by "compact" individual consciousness and the latter by a more "differentiated" consciousness, capable of discerning the eternal and unconditional truth of being from that which is merely contingent. Of particular relevance to the present essay on this subject is Voegelin's notion of *historiogenesis* (discussed in 2.2.2): *qua* speculation on the origin and destiny of man and conceiving of an inherent order in the cosmos, in which man stands beneath an unknown God or gods, Voegelin holds this capacity to be inherent to the structure of human consciousness, as we noted.

In this sense, the historical dimension of Voegelin's philosophical anthropology becomes an integral part of his philosophy of consciousness, because human nature is thereby shown to have a historiogenetic aspect that would render possible the tension toward the ground of being. Accordingly, the place of history, in the course of the development of Voegelin's conception of consciousness, changes, as we saw. Voegelin, first rejecting the scheme of an abstract series of political "ideas," then the centrality of experience and its symbolization, found consciousness itself as the core of his philosophy of politics, itself constituting a "luminosity" that might indicate to man the way towards the ground of his being.

Because Voegelin's philosophical anthropology is concerned precisely with the eternal and immutable in man, particularly his rational and spiritual dimensions, and because he adapts from Scheler a multi-faceted ontology of man, Voegelin was able to utilize effectively the discipline to evaluate critically his own political reality. Because the events of history are transitory and relative, human nature would stand as a guide against historicist deformities of the being of man. As we saw in Voegelin's criticism of race ideologies and Germany's reconciliation to its Nazi past, both cases involve a



reduction of human being, which became for Voegelin the basis of social criticism. Such is the activity that Voegelin envisions for the political scientist: critical confrontation with the prevailing self-understanding of society.

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