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A Study of Helmuth Plessner and Eric Voegelin

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INHALT

William Petropulos

Beyond Max Weber's Value Free Science: Philosophical Anthropology and Religious Experience: A Study of Helmuth Plessner and Eric Voegelin[1]

Introduction

This essay concentrates on one aspect of the work of Helmuth Plessner and Eric Voegelin, their confrontation with, and attempt to overcome, the limits Max Weber imposed upon social science by confining it to "value free empirical science". The choice of focus is governed by the conviction that Plessner's and Voegelin's responses to Weber lead to the heart of their own contributions to political science.

So that the reader may be confident that he is starting from the same point as the author, I will briefly state what Max Weber means by value free science and what "beyond value free science" refers to in this essay. By "science" Weber means empirical science [2]. Science is

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[1] I wish to thank the Earhart Foundation for the generous research grant which made this project possible. [This project also includes the author's "Stefan George und Eric Voegelin", *Occasional Papers*, LI, Munich: Eric-Voegelin-Archiv, December 2005.]I also gratefully acknowledge the support of Professors Glenn Hughes, Peter J. Opitz, Geoffrey L. Price (1942-2005), and Ellis Sandoz, who took an interest in this research at an early stage. I wish to express my thanks to Anna E Frazier of the Eric Voegelin Archive of the Geschwister Scholl Institute of the University of Munich for providing excellent working conditions.

[2] Max Weber outlined the nature of value free science in his 1904 essay, "The 'objectivity' of Social Science and Social Policy Knowledge". Max Weber, "Die 'Objektivität sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis" in: *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 19 (1904). Reprinted in: Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, edited by Johannes Winckelmann, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1951, 146-214.

concerned with facts. It cannot provide norms from which the directives for immediate personal acts can be deduced. By examining the nature of the means required to reach various ends science can help one choose between alternative ends. Science can provide insight into what the values realized in any chosen end will "cost" in terms of the other values that cannot be realized when this specific end is pursued. Finally, science can help one attain clarity about the nature of one's value system by demonstrating what consequences flow from the premises of that system. But the selection of an end itself involves normative choices, so-called "value judgments", and these lie outside the realm of science.

The expression "beyond value free science" as it is used in this essay does not take a position in regard to Weber's understanding of empirical science but refers to the intention of getting beyond the philosophical presuppositions of Weber's position.

The presuppositions of "value free science" are rooted in a specific cultural setting, that of secularized Protestantism of the German Empire during the late 19th century. Value free science takes its starting point in the assumption that there is no rational (scientific) knowledge of man's moral nature. The science of man is thus confined to the empirical social sciences. These in turn take as their model the sciences developed to investigate the phenomena found in the space-time-continuum. This is not to suggest that the practitioners of value free science – among whom Max Weber is perhaps now the best known – questioned man's moral nature. On the contrary, they realized that their own commitment to the "value" of science was based on a moral decision.

The culture that brought forth value free science was a product of the German Empire, founded in 1871. Further intellectual development in this society led to a shift in man's understanding of himself. Decade by decade the faith in man which informed the intellectuals of Max Weber's generation eroded. According to Max Scheler the descent of man's view of himself from *imago Dei* to a denizen of the natural world – a process greatly speeded up by the experience of World War One – produced conflicting groups that followed their instinctual interests, be they of race, nation, state, or class.[3] Out of

[3] Max Scheler, "Die Christliche Liebesidee in der gegenwärtigen Welt" in: *Vom Ewigen im Menschen, Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 7, Bern: Frank Verlag,

World War One emerged Bolshevism in Russia, Fascism in Italy, and, in other European countries, brought forth utopian dreams, political demands, and fanatical parties that had lost contact with reality. Germany felt the full weight of these developments.

As a consequence the generation of scholars that followed Max Weber found itself in a culture threatened by a rising tide of irrational forces. With the rational framework of culture and science under attack there arose both a theoretical and a practical need to examine the presuppositions of value free science. The following essay explores the ways chosen by two members of the generation that followed Max Weber to try to get beyond value free science. One questioned the philosophical and religious presuppositions of value free science, the other tried to systematize these presuppositions into a doctrine of human nature, thus providing value free science with an anthropological foundation. Helmuth Plessner took the second way. He accepted Weber's presuppositions and asked: if all that can be rationally known of the human being is found in the "mundane perspective"[4], what conclusions must we draw concerning the nature of the human being himself? Eric Voegelin took the first way. He disputed the presuppositions of Weber's science and argued that there are indeed rational ways of knowing man's moral nature. Denying that empirical social science is the only science of man, Voegelin returned to the realm of religious and philosophical experience in order to explain human nature. The center of the human being is found in the religious *conversio* and the platonic *periagoge*.

Following a presentation of the presuppositions of value free science as they are revealed in Weber's lectures on science and politics as vocations, chapter one examines Plessner's and Voegelin's initial responses to Weber's position. Here works written between 1924 and 1931 are considered. Chapter two looks at the practical and pedagogical intentions of Plessner's and Voegelin's understanding of politics, specifically at their hopes for a renewal of political order in Germany. Here writings from the years just before the triumph of National Socialism in 1933 are examined. By the time of Plessner's exile from Germany, 1933, and Voegelin's exile from Austria in

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1954. Here 370. Vide *The Eternal in Man*, Translated by Bernard Noble, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1960. Here 372.

[4] A phrase from Max Weber. Vide Chapter One below.

1938, the principles of their different approaches to the problem of overcoming value free science had been worked out: Plessner's philosophical anthropology and Voegelin's focus on religious experience. Chapter three looks at Plessner's and Voegelin's theoretical reflections during their exile and at the relationship of their thought to German culture. In the conclusion central concepts of Weber's position that were examined in chapter one are discussed anew in the light of the transformation they underwent in Plessner's and Voegelin's work between 1924 and 1944.

I. Science and Politics

1. Max Weber: Science and Politics from the "mundane perspective"

The lectures "Science as a Vocation" and "Politics as a Vocation", held at the University of Munich on 7 November 1917 and 28 January 1919 respectively are concise statements of the broader principles that underlie Max Weber's commitment to value free science[5]. They contain many of the categories and positions that became the starting points for Plessner's and Voegelin's thought on social science. I will therefore begin with a summary of "Science as a Vocation"[6] and add a few notes on "Politics as a Vocation".

[5] Max Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf 1917/1919-Politik als Beruf* 1919 in: Max Weber *Gesamtausgabe*, edited by Horst Baier et. al. Section I. *Schriften und Reden*, Vol. 17, edited by Wolfgang J. Mommsen et. al., Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1992, VII.

[6] In German the term "science" ("Wissenschaft") refers to all disciplines concerned with the rational and methodical investigation of reality - physical sciences, *Naturwissenschaften*, as well as human sciences, *Geistes-wissenschaften*. In the following pages "science" is used in this comprehensive sense.

1) Science as a Vocation

"Science as a Vocation"[7] is divided into two sections. In the first, and much shorter part, Weber deals with the external conditions of science in the modern world, contrasting the capitalistically funded and bureaucratically organized universities in America with German state universities. In the latter some aspects of pre-capitalist artisan culture still exist. Weber believes that the profession of the scholar in Germany will more and more take on the bureaucratic pattern that developed in the United States.

In the second section Weber turns to the "inward calling for science" (134). The scientist must be able to concentrate on his narrowly specialized area of research with the passion of one who believes that the "fate of his soul" (135) depends on his completing even the most modest task. "For nothing is worthy of a man as man unless he can pursue it with passionate devotion" (135). In any vocation the great enemy of good work is vanity. The measure of the stature of a man's personality is found solely in the degree to which he can put aside personal considerations and concentrate on the intellectual and ethical requirements of his vocation.

The "fate" of the scientist is to have any work that he has completed superseded by the efforts of coming generations. This fact raises the question of why one engages in scientific activity at all. What fulfillment does one seek in achievements that will be made obsolete by those who follow one? To answer this question Weber looks at the role of science in the millennial civilizational process of "intellectual rationalization" which has been "created by science and scientifically oriented technology"(139). "Intellectual rationalization" means:

> "that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service"(139).

Weber describes three stages of the development that brought us to the present state of value free science. In the first, with Plato and the

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[7] Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation" in: H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in* Sociology, New York: Oxford University Press, 1946, 129-159.

Greeks, science and philosophy were one and the same. The discovery of the "concept" led to a method which the Greeks were confident would allow them to attain knowledge of true being (140). If one could find the right concept in one's investigation of a particular problem it was thought that one could then teach the citizen how to act in regard to that problem. An eminently political people, the Greeks engaged in scientific studies in order to train the citizen in his ethical and political responsibilities.

Weber finds the second stage in the Renaissance's transformation of the experiment into a systematic principle of research. To the men who stood on the "threshold to modern times" science was the way to "true nature". And since, behind "nature" stood God, science was the "path to God" (142). Today no one – "aside from certain big children"[8] – believes that the natural sciences can teach us anything concerning the "*meaning* of the world". They are far more apt "to make the belief that there is such a thing as the 'meaning' of the universe die out at its very roots" (142). Weber is emphatic: "That science today is irreligious no one will doubt in his innermost being, even if he will not admit it to himself" (142). The development of science has dispelled the former "illusions" that science is the way to "true being", "true nature", or "God".

In view of this state of affairs Tolstoy concluded that science is meaningless. It gives no answers to the questions that most deeply affect the soul: What shall we do and how shall we live (143)? Weber accepts this criticism and therefore addresses the issue of what questions science can answer.

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[8] Weber's example for one of these "big children" is the 1909 winner of the Nobel prize for chemistry, Wilhelm Ostwald. Ostwald developed a cultural philosophy, termed "energetics", and, between 1912 and 1915, led the German Monists (Deutscher Monistenbund), an organization dedicated to replacing Christianity with a "scientific religion". For Weber's comments on Ostwald's philosophy of culture, vide "Energetische Kulturtheorien" in: *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 29 (1909), 575-598. Reprinted in: Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, 400-426.

For Ostwald's conception of "scientific" religion, vide the author's, *Offene Gesellschaft – Geschlossene Seele. Zum Glaubenssymbol einer zeitgenössischen Popularphilosophie*, Germering: Polis, 1998, 58-101.

Science is without “presuppositions” in the sense that it no longer claims to be the path to true nature, being, or God. It does presuppose that the rules of logic and method are valid means of orientation in the world. Further, that scientific work leads to a knowledge of things “worth knowing”. But this latter presupposition cannot be proven by scientific means. For no science, natural or social, can go beyond the object it describes to rationally judge whether that object is worth studying, or whether the knowledge gained through that study is worth having.

The distinction between the realm of meaning which is beyond science, and the realm of description to which science is confined, leads Weber to consider the role of university teacher and student:

> “It is one thing to state facts, to determine mathematical or logical relations or the internal structure of cultural values, while it is another thing to answer the question of the value of culture and its individual contents and the question of how one should act in the cultural community and in political associations. These are quite heterogeneous problems”(146).

“Demagogues” and “prophets” have no place in the classroom. They should confine their activities to the public forum where they can be questioned, contradicted, and opposed. There is no place for “personal value judgments” in the lecture hall; it is the teacher’s task to present facts. For every practical position – including the ones Weber has taken – there are “inconvenient” facts. Science cannot plead a cause because ultimate ideals rest on value judgments which are outside the range of rational judgments of fact (146).

At this juncture Weber restates his notion of what it means to live in the disenchanted world. I must quote extensively for, especially here, the very words Weber uses – drawing on terms from the age of faith and applying them to the so-called "disenchanted” modern world – lead directly to the spiritual center of Weber’s position.

> “We live as did the ancients when their world was not yet disenchanted of its gods and demons, only we live in a different sense. As Hellenic man at times sacrificed to Aphrodite and at other times to Apollo, and, above all, as everybody sacrificed to the gods of his city, so do we still nowadays, only the bearing of man has been disenchanted and denuded of its mystical but inwardly genuine plasticity. Fate, and certainly not ‘science’, holds sway over these gods and their struggles. One can only understand what the godhead is in the one or in the other order” (148).

In this equation of “values” with “gods” and the assertion that the ancient “gods” were “irreconcilable”, and that modern “values” are equally “irreconcilable”, Weber asserts a parallelism whose nature is not immediately clear. What is the common denominator between "gods" and "values" that allows the one term to stand for the other? In order to understand how Weber arrives at this position we have to keep track of how the language of the cosmos, complete with its “gods”, “demons”, and “fate”, are worked into Weber's argument. Let us look closely at Weber's chief example for why science cannot be called upon to decide between such “ultimate ideas” (“gods”):

> “What man will take upon himself the attempt to ‘refute scientifically’ the ethic of the Sermon on the Mount? For instance, the sentence ‘resist no evil’, or the image of turning the other cheek? And yet it is clear, in mundane perspective, that this is an ethic of undignified conduct; one has to choose between the religious dignity which this ethic confers and the dignity of manly conduct which preaches something quite different; ‘resist evil – lest you be co-responsible for an overpowering evil’. According to our ultimate standpoint, the one is the devil and the other the God, and the individual has to decide which is God for him and which is the devil. And so it goes throughout the orders of life”(148).

The importance of this dichotomy between “religious dignity” and the dignity of the “mundane perspective” is underlined by the fact that Weber follows this distinction with a discussion of the historical development of religion in the West. Weber tells us that the “rational and methodical conduct of life” developed when Christianity dethroned the polytheism of the ancient world. In place of polytheism, it enjoined man to heed the “’one thing that is needful’”.[9] But Christianity, “faced with the realities of outer and inner life”, made the “compromises and relative judgments, which we all know from its history”. The result is that “today the routines of everyday life challenge religion". Weber’s metaphors again require that his words be quoted:

> “Many old gods ascend from their graves; they are disenchanted and hence take the form of impersonal forces. They strive to gain power over our lives and again they resume their eternal struggle with one another.”

And further:

> “Our civilization destines us to realize more clearly these struggles again, after our eyes have been blinded for a thousand years –

[9] *Luke*, 10: 42.

> blinded by the allegedly or presumably exclusive orientation towards the grandiose moral fervor of Christian ethics" (149).

From this digression, in which Weber has proceeded from the ancient world of polytheism, through the history of Christianity, to the "disenchanted" world in which the polytheistic "gods" reemerge as "impersonal forces", Weber breaks off abruptly with: "But enough of these questions which lead far away". However, it is clear that, for Weber, "these questions" are among the most important ones in "Science as a Vocation". All the more surprising that he so abruptly breaks off the discussion.

Having disposed of the scientist who feels called upon to act as "prophet" or "demagogue", Weber returns to what science does offer to practical and personal life. First, it "contributes to the technology of controlling life by calculating external objects as well as man's activities" (150). Second, it teaches methods of thinking and provides the tools one needs for a life of thought. It helps one to gain "*clarity*" (151). In this regard it can show us what means are necessary if we wish to attain a specific end. It thus confronts us with the question of whether, in our view, the end justifies the means. Further, where "ultimate ideals" are involved, it can demonstrate how a specific end is derived from a specific world view. It thereby calls upon us to consider whether we are acting with "integrity" when we choose such an end. Are we willing to take responsibility for the consequences, intended and unintended, which may result from acting in accordance with the convictions inherent to that world view? In raising such issues science helps the individual to "give himself an *account of the ultimate meaning of his own conduct*". The position that Weber presents:

> "Takes its point of departure from the one fundamental fact, that as long as life remains immanent and is interpreted in its own terms, it knows only of an unceasing struggle of these gods with one another. Or speaking directly, the ultimate possible attitudes toward life are irreconcilable, and hence their struggle can never be brought to a final conclusion" (152).

The fate of our time is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization, above all, by the disenchantment of the world. The sublime values have retreated into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relationships (155). To the person who "cannot bear the fate of the times like a man", Weber suggests that he bring the "sacrifice of

intellect" which dogmatic faith requires and return to the church. For those who do not want to return to the church, Weber assures them that there are no new prophets to follow. He appeals to the students to face up to the "'demands of the day'". And this can be done "if each finds and obeys the demon who holds the fibers of his very life"(156).

2) "Politics as a Vocation"[10]

Sociologically the political association may be characterized by a specific means that is peculiar to it, the use of physical force. This is not the only means open to it, nor the normal one, but it is the one specially reserved to it. The political association today is the state, a human community that claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a certain territory. Hence politics means striving to share power, or to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state. A political relationship is one that both parties accept as legitimate and in which one person dominates another, supported by means of coercion (78).

The individual who follows the vocation of politics must possess three important qualities: passion, the virtue of responsibility, and a sense of proportion. For Weber passion must take the form of sober devotion to one's cause, "to the god or demon who directs it". Whatever goal the politician serves, national, social or ethical, his commitment must be anchored in some kind of faith that goes beyond the mere self. Otherwise the curse of "creaturely nothingness" will weigh upon his every achievement.

Weber now turns to the question of the place of politics within the whole of what we call life. All ethical acts can be seen in terms of two mutually exclusive maxims: the "ethic of conviction" and the "ethic of responsibility". The absolutist ethic of conviction which enjoins one to turn the other cheek and not resist evil is only a responsible form of conduct for one who lives exclusively for the Kingdom of God. The ethic of responsibility takes into account the foreseeable consequences of one's action in the world. If the politician does not resist evil he contributes to its triumph. In addition, in this world, one is sometimes compelled to use questionable means in pursuit of a good cause. Nor can the question

[10] Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation" in: *From Max Weber*, 77-128.

of when good ends justify doubtful means be answered once and for all. In short, one cannot enter the field of political action without endangering one's soul.

The means that must sometimes be applied in politics, acts of coercion in the struggle for power, cannot be governed by the same ethical maxims that guide a religious community or family relationship. The person who follows the vocation of politics must realize that he who enters into a pact with powers that can never be completely brought under control must face up to the consequences to which such means often lead. The politician is advised to follow the "ethic of responsibility" that takes into account human weakness and the Janus face of force and violence.

Of course Weber recognizes that, in practical life, even for the most responsible person, the time may come when one has to say, "I stand here and can do no other"[11]. Only in the union of the two ethical positions do we find the person who can truly be said to have the calling for politics. Such a person must be sure that if, from his point of view, the world turns out to be too stupid and base to properly respond to what he has to offer, he will not be crushed by the experience. Only the individual who is strong enough to continue "despite everything" has the vocation for politics.

3) Summary

In these two lectures there are a number of positions that will concern us in what follows:

Disenchantment. It is Weber's conviction that the process of "intellectual rationalization", driven by science has led to the state of "disenchantment". There are no "gods", or world transcending powers, merely world-immanent "impersonal powers".

True being and "God". Empirical science is the only rational form of knowledge for which Weber reserves the concept "science". Since, in principle, science can get control over the powers that affect our lives, religion is obsolete. Behind this notion is the reduction of religion to a form of magic. Now that enlightened man no longer believes in occult powers he has no need of religion.

[11] Words attributed to Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms.

Philosophy and "Illusion". In reducing Plato's work to the discovery of the "concept" Weber severely limits the scope of philosophy. The meaning of the "parable of the cave" and the ascent to the idea of the good is treated by Weber only in terms of what it means for the attainment of the knowledge of being. The experience of the ascent on the part of the person who undertakes it, who turns from intra-mundane existence to transcendence, and the fact that this experience is a pre-requisite for obtaining objective knowledge, is not discussed. Heinrich Rickert has commented on the inadequacy of Weber's view of philosophy:

> "It is not true that Plato's passionate enthusiasm for knowledge is to be explained (as Weber's argument might lead one to think) simply by the fact that this was the *first* conscious discovery of one of the great instruments of scientific cognition, the essence of the concept, and that this led to an overestimation of what conceptual thinking could contribute to practical life. Concepts still have something to give to today's researcher that does not simply boil down to a 'disenchantment' of the world; in particular, we have no need to renounce Socratic man's pleasure in the 'logos' when we practice rigorous conceptual thought.[12]

The "pleasure in the *logos*" is nothing less than the "love of wisdom", the search for truth. This entire realm of experience, the motive and center of philosophy, falls under Weber's verdict of "illusion". He retains only one of the "results" of philosophy, the function of the "concept".

Facts and values. Science deals with empirical fact. What cannot be established as fact belongs to the realm of value. Science is public because it has rational, objective criteria; values are private and value judgments subjective because there are no principle rational means of reaching agreement concerning them. Naturally, in any particular society or group there is generally widespread agreement concerning values. Weber's point is that this consensus cannot be brought about by scientific means.

Criteria of selection. Science gives us *negative criteria* for value selection. Values which, when transformed into actions, can reasonably be expected to result in an antagonism with what science

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[12] Heinrich Rickert, "Max Weber und seine Stellung zur Wissenschaft" in: *Logos*, 15 (1926). Excerpts are translated and reprinted in: Peter Lassman and Irving Velody with Hermino Martins, eds., *Max Weber's 'Science as a Vocation'*, London: Unwin Hyman, 1989, 76-87. Here, 82.

tells us can be realized in the world are “utopian” and must be rejected by a person committed to the ethics of responsibility.

Science and “fate”. Two developments, science growing and faith diminishing, converge in the spiritual state of "disenchantment". Because scientific progress is an “irreversible” process it is man's "fate" to live in the “disenchanted” world. But this “fate” must be chosen. The person who follows the ethics of conviction ignores it. The person adhering to the ethics of responsibility will attune his actions to what science has taught him can be realistically pursued. However science cannot tell one to choose the ethics of responsibility. *Fortuna* and character, not science, lead men to choose their fate.[13]

Infinite progress and obsolescence. Science does not yield to the knowledge of “true being” or demonstrate the way “to God”. The results that empirical sciences achieve become outdated and the scientist must reconcile himself to the fact that his work is part of a never ending process. The fulfillment of reaching an “end” is closed to the scientist.

Passion and distance. One must exercise one’s vocation with “passion”. By passion Weber means unstinting dedication to one’s calling. The great enemy of any vocation (science, politics, art, business, etc.) is vanity, the *amor sui*. Thus, for Weber, “passion” means the opposite of what it does in everyday language: “distance” to oneself.

Faith and purpose. All vocations, and especially that of politics, must be rooted in “faith” (or a purpose) that goes beyond the self. Otherwise the work rests only on the shoulders of the mortal creature himself, on his “creaturely nothingness”.

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[13] In his discussion of fate Weber recalls Plato’s notion of the soul choosing its lot (*Politeia* 617d-e). Regarding Weber’s notion of *fortuna* one must consider his debt to Machiavelli. The conflict between the ruler choosing his fate in light of the good, or of grasping the opportunity presented him by *fortuna* to establish a state while committing acts that can only be judged evil, is a problem which Machiavelli discussed in *The Prince*. Vide, Eric Voegelin, “The Order of Power: Machiavelli” in: Voegelin, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Vol. 22, The History of Political Ideas, Vol. IV, Renaissance And Reformation*, edited with an Introduction by David L. Morse and William M. Thompson, Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1998, 31-87. Here 82-86.

Ethics of politics. The morals of politics cannot be the same as those of the family or the religious community. The politician must reckon with hostile feelings and conflicts of interest. He cannot base his judgments on the assumption that all are working together in a spirit of co-operation.

"Dignity" and the "mundane perspective". Weber describes his standpoint as that of the "mundane perspective" (148). From the position of one who wishes to act in the world and shape politics the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount are "undignified". One cannot "turn the other cheek". If one does not resist evil in the world one bear's part of the responsibility for its triumph.

Religion and *The moral center*. In "Science as a Vocation" Weber breaks off his discussion of "religion"(149). But it is clear that this is the lecture's central focus. He contrasts the "disenchanted world" to the age of belief. It is science that has advanced the process of "intellectual rationalization" which brought about the state of disenchantment. Likewise in "Politics as a Vocation" religion is the center of Weber's deliberations. Morals divide between the other worldly "ethic of conviction" and the intra-mundane "ethic of responsibility". The world of politics turns on a moral axis. In the exceptional case, in which one's very existence as a moral being is at stake, Weber refers to Luther's "I can do no other".

Agnosticism. That the world of politics is also the world of morals does not change the fact that Weber is an agnostic. There are no prophets now and there is no rational way to true being or god. Those who seek god should come back another time, it is night, the dawn has not yet come.[14]

Private life. Man now lives in the "every-day-ness" of the structures of the world that have been demonstrated by science. The "sublime emotions", "brotherliness and personal relationships", are no longer parts of public life and have withdrawn into private communities.

Politics is the struggle for power. Politics is seen from the standpoint of the "struggle for power"; to be sure, power in the interest of a

[14] "'He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come.'", "Science as a Vocation", 156.

purpose that goes beyond the politician's ego. But that which principally binds a group of human beings into political community, which is logically and materially prior to the struggle of various groups for their share of power within the community, is not a theme.

Metaphors and inversions. Weber applies the terms "gods", "fate", "demon" metaphorically to the modern age of so-called "disenchantment". In view of the fact that the literal use of these terms only refers to "illusions" – for, according to Weber, there are no "gods" – we may wonder why he uses them at all. The answer, I think, is that they magnify man's role. Modern man has overcome the "illusions" and learned to face a godless world in a "manly" fashion.[15]

Nationalism. Weber asks, who can decide between the worth of the value of French or German culture?[16] But nowhere does Weber explain why national cultures must constitute ultimate orientations. Nevertheless Weber imposes this framework on the social sciences.[17]

The knowledge of domination, culture, and salvation. As far as value free science is confined to the calculation and adaptation of means to ends and to reconstructing chains of causality, there is no controversy with Weber's position that the realm of "fact" must be kept separate from the realm of "obligation". However Weber deals most inadequately with religious and philosophical experience.

Because this topic will concern us in what follows, it will be useful to introduce the terminology Max Scheler developed to distinguish among types of knowledge. The first type, empirical science, is concerned with the phenomenal world of the space-time-continuum.

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[15] The metaphor of "manliness" is used several times in Weber's lecture. For Weber "maleness" and "maturity" seem to overlap. Those who are mature realize that they are alone in the universe and face up to it in a "manly" fashion. Those who still believe that science leads to the knowledge of "true being", or opens the "path to god", are "big children"(142).

[16] Weber, "Science as a Vocation", 148.

[17] "As a 'value concept' the 'nation' remained outside the realm of scientific critique". Wolfgang Mommsen, *Max Weber und die deutsche Politik 1890-1920*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 2nd ed. 1972, 67. Further references, 67, footnote 116.

Its purpose is to get power over the "things" of the world: the "knowledge of domination". The second type is concerned with knowledge of the self. Its object is education, to develop the self toward a higher level of existence: the "knowledge of culture" or "philosophy". The third is concerned with the realm of godly being. Its object is to achieve attunement with the source of being: the "knowledge of salvation".[18]

The problem with Weber's value free science, that leads thinkers like Helmut Plessner and Eric Voegelin to search for a way to overcome it, is not with its role in the investigation of the world of things. But to limit the scope of science to the "knowledge of domination" creates the great problem that the subject matter of the other two types of knowledge are relegated to the irrational realm of "value judgments" where the individual is left to his own subjectivity.

2. Helmuth Plessner: The "mundane perspective" systematized

In an essay in 1924, "The Sociology of Modern Research and its Organization in the German University"[19], Plessner took up Weber's theme of science in the modern world. In *The Limits to Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism*, written in the same year, he built on the foundations of Weber's political thought.

"The Sociology of Modern Research" is divided into two parts, "The scientific form of modern society", and "Characteristics of the German University which Support Research: Tradition and Ideology". I will look at the first part of this lecture which contains Plessner's positions on the important questions raised by Weber and confine myself to a single remark on the second section.

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[18] Max Scheler, "Erkenntnis und Arbeit", in: *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Manfred Frings, Vol. 8, *Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft*, Bern: Franck, 1980, 191-383. Here, 203-211, et. passim.

[19] Helmuth Plessner, "Zur Soziologie der modernen Forschung und ihre Organization in der deutschen Universität" in: Max Scheler, ed., *Versuche zu einer Soziologie des Wissens*, Munich and Leipzig, 1924, 407-425. Reprinted in: Helmuth Plessner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by Günther Dux, et. al., Vol. X: *Schriften zur Soziologie und Sozialphilosophie.* Licensed edition, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003, 7-31.

Plessner begins with the statement that science has always had a social meaning because knowledge is a source of power. Also science itself is influenced by the class or group that acquires, administers, and benefits from its use. To this extent the scientific rationalization of society and the socialization of science take place continually. But today no one would think of making the current form of knowledge the measure of past or foreign forms. For it is modern man's conviction that science must be value free. Modern sociology turns instead to the study of the structural relationships between types of society and types of knowledge. In this method of investigation there is no relationship of "cause and effect" or of "foundation and superstructure" between the various spheres of life, but science, politics, economics, culture, religion, etc., are viewed as life's equally primordial expressions which, at any particular time, manifest a common style.

In occidental culture Plessner finds three such styles. That expressed in the hierarchical form of the Middle Ages, with its sciences of the scaled order of being and with its political estates, the equally hierarchical form of the era of Natural Rights and Absolutism, and the contemporary egalitarian form of empirical research and parliamentary democracy. The first two forms constitute closed systems. The social organization, culminating in Pope and emperor, find their analogies in sciences whose investigations extend from the temporal realm of becoming to the eternal sphere of being. The task of science is to fill out and elaborate the details of the world's essential structures.

The modern world breaks with the hierarchical order in both science and politics. The legitimacy of its leaders is based on temporal exigency not divine dispensation and, in a process of experimentation extending into the indefinite future, science investigates the phenomena of the space-time continuum.

In the modern world the notion of the human being also changes. The *lumen naturale* of the autonomous individual replaces the earlier world transcendent sources of truth and authority and in turn becomes completely secularized. The individual confronts nature as a "mechanism" to be brought under a calculus of control. The progress of the knowledge of domination leads to ever new areas of investigation and thus produces ever new areas of specialization. Life becomes focused on the "future". Indeed, without the dynamics

of the unceasing search for the "new" and previously "unknown" the modern social system could not even stabilize itself. The modern period may be described as the "*industrialization of science"* and *"the rationalization of social life*".[20]

The notion that the good originates in god, or in reason that transcends the world, is replaced by faith in the will of the intra-mundane human subject. Like any other specialized area the human sphere also develops into one of autonomous laws, the principal of which is respect for the individual's freedom and dignity.

In the second part of the essay Plessner observes that whereas England and France created classes with *otium*, German political history prevented the emergence of such an estate. Without the benefit of a stable traditional political form, and the representative type of human being that it brings forth, Germany had to develop its culture within state institutions created for the training of professional civil servants. It is this very lack of tradition – so Plessner – that makes the German student best suited for the modern world in which tradition is being constantly eroded by the advance of science and civilization.

What is the relationship of Plessner's essay to the position Max Weber outlined?

Plessner does not take up Tolstoy's question of why science should interest us when it cannot answer the questions that touch the depths of our being, but confines us to the knowledge of domination in a process that goes on into the indefinite future while we ourselves must perish. Plessner accepts the current situation in which the knowledge of culture and the knowledge of salvation have been discredited as a simple fact of life.

Auguste Comte taught that civilization develops through three stages: the theological, the metaphysical, and that of positive science. These recur in Weber as the ages in which one believed that one could attain knowledge of god, in the age in which one believed that philosophy would lead to the knowledge of true being, and in the age of modern science. Weber assumes an historical link between the three ages, the process of "intellectual rationalization" which goes on

[20] Plessner, Ibid., 17.

into infinity and has no meaning in itself. Plessner's method of examining the epochs in terms of style has no need to discuss development. He sketches no connection between the three epochs he mentions: the Middle Ages, the Age of Reason, and the modern age of empirical science.

Nevertheless, if he does not discuss, and try to justify the development that has led to the current state of affairs, he still affirms it. Man's "power" to create becomes the perspective in which social phenomena are viewed. It is "man's" world because man limits his self-understanding to the "mundane perspective". In Plessner's words: "The intra-mundane orientation in regard to the whole of life leads logically to the intra-mundane inspection of the world with the intention of dominating it from out of its own center".[21]

In Weber's inversion of "gods", who in the profane world return as "impersonal powers", and in his metaphors of the "manliness" needed to face up to the claims, burdens, and tragedy of modern life, we find ourselves in a Promethean world. In Plessner the heroics, the pathos, and the charisma of Weber's Titanism disappear and we enter the "every-day-ness" ("Veralltäglichung") of the spiritual state of disenchantment. The hero who bore the tension of two worlds struggling in one breast has been replaced by the student who is getting along nicely with his worldly vocation, who indeed may get along better than others because he has so few traditions to discard.

Behind Weber's agnostic Titanism and Plessner's "every-day-ness" looms the question of "power". The intra-mundane human being is occupied with the "care of securing his life and increasing his power".[22] In "duty to himself" the human fulfils his obligations. And since the human is not alone in the world he must try to harmonize his interests with others pursing theirs with the same "care". Plessner's political framework is thus established: Life in the disenchanted world, orientation to the future of civilizational achievement, power as the center of human nature, and the need to

[21] "Innerweltliche Haltung zum ganzen Leben führt konsequent zur innerweltlichen Betrachtung der Welt in Absicht ihrer Beherrschung aus ihr selbst heraus". Ibid., 10.

[22] Ibid., 16.

harmonize the interests of radically isolated individuals intent on increasing and maintaining their power.

Plessner's *The limits to Community*[23] focuses on a problem of German politics. His starting point is the distinction made by Ferdinand Tönnies between the social forms of community and society.[24]

Much of the radical criticism of the Weimar Republic, especially on the part of the young, finds a common denominator in the conviction that the values of community should become the values of society – warmth, personal relationships, and sincerity should replace the masks, roles, and coldness of public life.

Plessner characterizes radicalism as the "faith in the healing power of the extremes, the method of opposing all traditional values". It combats social and political reality because what exists is always the result of compromise. Radicalism knows no restraint, its perspective is the boundlessness of infinity (14). Modern radicalism is rooted in the dualistic notion of man which holds the spirit to be good and the body evil. This view established itself in Germany during the Reformation and, despite the secularization that has since taken place, continues to dominate German thought. Thus the perennial problem of German public life is the seemingly unbridgeable chasm between morals and politics (21).

The criticism of radicalism, so Plessner, can be concisely expressed in the question: Is it possible to eliminate power and force? Can an ideal community of peace and brotherhood become the rule of the world? He denies that it can. The components of Plessner's negative answer include an analysis of the social forms of community and society, a justification of the state, and a view of man in which dualism is harmonized.

Community exists because the human being requires warmth and acceptance, society exists because all activities of life which go beyond the immediate and almost structure-less realm of personal

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[23] Plessner, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinschaft: Eine Kritik des sozialen Radikalismus*, Bonn: Friedrich Cohen, 1924. Reprinted in: *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. VIII, 7-133.

[24] Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, Leipzig, 1887.

relationships require power, prestige, and indirectness. In the areas of social life that are not regulated by legal or other norms compromises must be sought that take power relations into account. The serious business of life must be conducted in ceremonies and forms and according to rules that protect the actors from wearing each other out with private emotions. Thus society is not merely a social form into which man has somehow been led by evil, but a necessary sphere in which the world's business must be done.

The public sphere begins where love and blood relations cease. It is the concept of possible relations between an indeterminate number of types of persons. It constitutes community's eternally opening horizon. "Without this border [or limit (Grenze)] community is no longer community"(56). Because there is no connection between community and society, and no third form that encompasses both, the human being must bridge them artificially.

At this point Plessner introduces the idea of the state. The human being delegates power to the state, which is not a substance but a procedure. By creating norms and laws it balances the contrary claims of community and society. Law is the tangent between both spheres changing continually as the claims of community and society are harmonized through decisions that take into account both power relations and the need to preserve the freedom and dignity of the contending parties.

The unity of the state is found in the constitution. No law can be made without the assertion that it is valid. To gain and hold respect the state must have power. Decisions have to be made and this requires leadership. The "sovereign" is the one who decides in the exceptional situation. The state's decisions are not made by „persons" but by functionaries who have "ir-realized" themselves into a social role. In order to implement policy the full range of instruments that treat men as means, not as ends, must be applied (119-120).

But to whom is the statesman responsible? Plessner answers, to „history" and to „god". These symbols have the function of relieving the politician of a burden which no individual can bear alone. It is the politician's „enormous" freedom of action that compels him to „bind himself by subjecting his will to god's" (124). The bond with god also gives the politician the discipline and the strength he needs to destroy his enemies, for there is no political activity without at

least the threat of destruction. Politics is the making of acts out of opportunities, and each subsequent decision alters the meaning of former events by drawing them into a new constellation.

In his closing pages Plessner seeks a "middle way" that balances the demands of spirit and nature. The human being is the longing for home („Heimweh“) on the part of one who is rooted in infinity but bound to finitude. The balance between spirit and life is the foundation of human dignity. Man must learn to live within the limitations that finitude imposes: The world cannot be revolutionized (131). Because human dignity cannot be preserved without power, the pursuit of power must be affirmed as the „obligation to power“. From this standpoint the public sphere of the state is the realm of the „hygiene of the soul“.

Plessner opposes the goals and illusory methods of the radicals, but he also gives an account of why there is a justified protest on their part. The truth that power is necessary to the hygiene of the soul has been obscured by the onslaught made upon society by the most recent stages of industrialism and human exploitation. The Social Darwinist’s doctrine of life as the „struggle for existence” destroys culture; the naked pursuit of "making money" has no use "for the artificialities which were called into life to protect human dignity“ (109).

It is Plessner's conviction, and plea, that a society worthy of the name must be regained. This involves a two front struggle against the pressures of naturalism that are destroying civilization and against the dream of community that causes young people to turn their back on society.

Plessner takes Weber’s definition of the passion needed for one engaged in a modern vocation – distance from oneself and concentration on one's task – and makes it the quality that the social form of society requires of each individual, whatever his social role.[25] In "Politics as a Vocation" Weber argues from the “mundane

[25] For the relationship of Plessner’s thought to the “society of coldness” in Germany between the World Wars, vide Helmuth Lethen, “Philosophische Anthropologie und Literatur in den zwanziger Jahren. Helmut Plessners neusachliches Mantel- und Degenstück” in: Wolfgang Eßbach, Joachim Fischer and Helmuth Lethen, *Plessners “Grenzen der Gemeinschaft”: Eine*

perspective". But Weber can still quote the Watchman's song from Isaiah:

> "He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come."

If one gets the impression that Weber himself does not expect the dawn, nevertheless the possibility is principally open. All Weber asks of his audience is that they not wait passively and that they not follow false prophets.

Plessner, on the other hand, treats those who orient their lives and actions to transcendence as fanatics whose sense of the transcendent is corrupt and whose actions therefore aim at revolutionizing the world. When Plessner otherwise refers to the symbol of "god", then only as a function to relieve the statesman of the burden that Weber mentioned falls upon man's "creaturely nothingness" when his actions are not rooted in something greater than his own ego. But it is clear that the god of Plessner's statesman is not the god of the Biblical prophets. In Plessner there is no transcendence. The radicals only deceive themselves that there is. The responsible person, who defends society against the claims of the radicals, has opted for this world against the next:

> "Why should giving up the world be rated higher than giving oneself over to its fullness and its danger? Why should the sinner who sins courageously with open eyes not be held as high in our esteem as the monk" (133)?

Indeed, why not? But such rhetorical questions can only be posed where the relationship to transcendence has been discredited. The instances when a statesmen must say „I stand here, I can do no other", may be rare. But the religious-moral dimension of politics is open in Weber because the God the statesman invokes is not just a function of his office. When Plessner discusses a statesman's moral conflict he chooses the example of Bethmann-Hollweg. As Chancellor of Germany at the outbreak of World War I, and morally

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Debatte, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002, 29-62. In the same volume: Wolfgang Eßbach, "Verabschieden oder retten? Helmuth Lethens Lektüre von Helmuth Plessners 'Grenzen der Gemeinschaft'", 63-80; Joachim Fischer, "Panzer oder Maske. 'Verhaltenslehre der Kälte' oder Sozialtheorie der 'Grenze'", 80-102. For the relation of Plessner's notion of society to the mores of court culture see, in the same volume: Bruno Accarino, "Spuren des Hofstaates in Plessners 'Grenzen der Gemeinschaft'", 131-159.

troubled over the violation of Belgium neutrality, which he nevertheless thought a military necessity, he publicly expressed his regret over the act. As a result he was criticized by a British newspaper for having the effrontery to apologize. The editor asserted that one can forgive acts of political injustice, but it is utterly shameless for a statesman to commit them and, at the same time, apologize for them (122-123).

It may well be that the ambiguities of Bethmann-Hollweg's conduct can only lead to misunderstanding. But it is significant that Plessner chooses this example. Where the various possibilities of human action have been divided between the sphere of community and the sphere of society ethical questions are treated sociologically. Weber's sense of the morally tragic, in which the fate of one's soul is at stake, is replaced by attention to the problem of falling out of one's social role and losing face.

Plessner adheres to Weber's notion of politics as the struggle for power in the interest of an ego-transcending purpose. Just as the state is the "procedure" of power, by which the claims of society and community are harmonized, so the individual has "no reason to distrust the 'will to power'". If the dynamic structures nourished by human instinct are value-indifferent, they nevertheless find their equivalents at the level of spiritual duties. The "will to power" is rescued by the "duty to power". As the state establishes the balance between the claims of community and society, so the soul, not a substance, but a procedure, balances the claims between spirit and body.

In a world without transcendence, if Plessner does not want to lose the qualities of the human being, the idea of which developed in the human's understanding of himself as the creature of God, a new foundation for the "human being" will have to be found. It will have to explain why man once needed "transcendence" but no longer does, and it will have to show how what were once called "morals", founded on man's illusory relationship to the transcendent creator, can be given a new foundation. These issues, which arise where the idea of the "disenchanted world" is fully embraced, will concern us in the next chapter.

3. Eric Voegelin: From Max Weber to Stefan George

Eric Voegelin responded to Max Weber's views of occidental culture and the nature of science and politics in lectures delivered in 1925[26] and 1930[27], and in the, during his lifetime, unpublished *Theory of Governance*[28] which he worked on between 1930 and 1931.

In his lectures he approaches these questions by focusing on Weber himself. In 1925 Voegelin asks, what constitutes the unity of Weber's work and how did Weber come to devote himself to it? Voegelin sees that the entire work is related to Weber's "idea of rationalism". And he asks, in addition to science that offers insight into the structure of reality but cannot guide one's moral actions, what elements entered into Weber's decision to follow the vocation of science and to place himself in the service of the process of "intellectual rationalization"? First, there was the modern Western cultural of rationality into which Weber was born. Second, there was Weber's affirmation of his *Volk*: value free science is the German form of Western rationality.[29] And, third, there was Weber's personal orientation in the world, Weber's "demon".

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[26] Voegelin, "Über Max Weber" in: Deutsche *Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaften und Geistesgeschichte* 3 (1925), 177-93. Translated and reprinted as "On Max Weber" in: *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol. 7. *Published Essays 1922-1928*. Edited with an Introduction by Thomas W. Heilke and John von Heyking, Columbia/London: University of Missouri Press, 2003, 100-117.

[27] Voegelin, "Max Weber" in: *Kölner Vierteljahrshefte für Soz*iologie 9 (1930), 1-16. Translated and reprinted as "Max Weber" in: *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Paul Caringella et. al., Vol. 8. *Published Essays 1929-1933*. Edited with an Introduction by Thomas W. Heilke and John von Heyking, Columbia/London: University of Missouri Press, 2003, 130-147.

[28] Eric Voegelin, *Herrschaftslehre*, circa 1930-1931. In: Voegelin Archive, Hoover Institution, Stanford, California, Box 55, Folder 5. Translated as *The Theory of Governance* in: Eric Voegelin, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol. 32, *The Theory of Governance and Other Miscellaneous Papers*, 1921-1938. Edited with an Introduction by William Petropulos und Gilbert Weiss, Columbia/London: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2003, 224-373.

[29] Voegelin, "On Max Weber, *The Collected Works*, Vol. 7, 111-112.

"That the historic sciences also display[…]profound differences due to their belonging to an ethnic entity is borne out by a remark made by a prominent personality of the British scientific establishment, to wit, that one of the most important effects produced by the war [1914-1918] was, as far as

In narrating the development of intellectual rationalization Weber related not "the" history of the West, but "his" own history (26). Voegelin speaks of Weber's "demonic lust and ecstatic mastering of the stream of history through *his* ideas of value" (26). Weber created the narrative of the “idea of rationalization” out of materials found in the depths of his own soul. In so doing he realized the "dream and longing of every great philosopher" to reach the point of speculation from which his own being can be understood and justified (26). Thus Weber’s creation of a philosophy of history was itself the work of the demon of which Weber's history spoke.

But — so Voegelin — with the figure of the “demon” the objective rational structure of the historical world also dissolves (27) and the world is revealed to be the object of the play of world transcending powers. Voegelin concludes that Max Weber's life exemplifies the fact that life’s meaning is not something to be found, but to be continually created. There is a place, prior to the world, where one is alone with one's demon. Because Weber reached this world creating place, and because what he experienced there found expression in his work, he became the person in whom the fate of the time found its most powerful symbol.

Here, without mentioning the poet by name, Voegelin quotes Stefan George[30]:

British scientists were concerned, their having been liberated from the nightmare of *value-free* science. Hence among the types of rational science a specific science – value-free science – is considered a specifically German phenomenon[…]”. Ibid., 112.

Voegelin’s concern with the relationship of a national culture to its form of social science was the subject of his first published essay, “Die gesellschaftliche Bestimmtheit soziologischer Erkenntnis. Eine soziologische Untersuchung”, *Zeitschrift für Volkswirtschaft und Sozialpolitik*, n.s. 2 (1922), 331-48. Translated and reprinted as “The Social Determination of Sociological Knowledge: A Sociological Examination” in: The Collected Works, Vol. 7, 27-48.

See also Eric Voegelin, “On National Types of Mind And the Limits to Interstate Relations”(1929). Published in: Eric Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, 430-482. Here 443.

[30] The poem is from the “Vorspiel” (Prelude) to the “Lieder vom Traum und Tod” (The Songs of Dream and Death). The poems of the Prelude present the beginning of George’s “Vita Nuova”. His vocation, which he had previously merely sensed, is now revealed to him. Vide Friedrich Gundolf, *George*, Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1920, 160-182.

> "So ring ich bis ans end allein? So weil ich
> Niemals versenkt im arm der treue? Sprich!
> 'Du machst dass ich vor mitleid zittre, freilich
> Ist keiner der dir bleibt, nur du und ich'".[31]

Voegelin contemplates the deepest recesses of Weber's soul with the metaphor (drawn from Weber himself) of the "demon", i.e. the experience that determined the direction of Weber's life and the choice of his vocation, and epitomizes this experience in lines that narrate the spiritual autobiography of Stefan George. In the 1925 essay Voegelin treats Weber and George as equals, the spiritual experience of the latter is used to interpret the soul of the former. In Voegelin's next work on Weber George remains the measure of the spiritual but in Voegelin's eyes Weber fails to attain objective spiritual stature ("Geist") and sinks back into the realm of the privately emotional ("Seele").

Voegelin's 1930 lecture[32] begins with the observation that in the West the dissolving effect of the intellect has undermined man's faith in the possibility of rationally justifying values. Although this process affects the West as a whole it is most advanced in Germany. England and France solidified their societies and stabilized their understanding of the human being, and therefore the spiritual framework in which political and ethical acts take place, at a time when classical philosophy and Christianity were the main sources for occidental society's idea of the human being. In England and France this image of man is still binding and constitutes the public space in which men can come together to act. But Germany's turbulent religious and political history did not allow a nationwide binding idea of man to emerge.

Since the values that guide action in Germany are not universally held the dissolving effects of the process of intellectual rationalization, which are felt everywhere in the West, erode more severely the German's faith in being able to rationally justify values.

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[31] "So I must struggle to the end alone / And never rest in faithful arms? Answer! / 'You move me to compassion, for indeed / No one remains with you – it is but you and I'". Stefan George, *Werke: Ausgabe in Zwei Bänden*, 3d. ed., Düsseldorf and Munich: Helmut Küpper vormals Georg Bondi, 1976, Vol. I., 186.

[32] Voegelin, "Max Weber" in: *The Collected Works*, Vol. 8, 130-147.

This results in a state of spiritual isolation. In Germany conditions have gotten so bad that "each individual must create the world for himself anew" (137).

Five years earlier, the idea that one creates one's own meaning was hailed by Voegelin as the "dream of every philosopher". Now he describes the condition in which the individual is thrown back completely on himself as one of dire suffering. Consequently what Weber symbolized for Voegelin in 1925 undergoes a profound change by 1930. Weber now stands out as the worthy symbol of German manhood because he bears the sufferings common to all Germans without false pathos or excuses.

Following the first mention of Weber by name, and as the superior person in a decadent time, Voegelin points to the signs of a beginning spiritual renewal. "At the lowest point of this decline, to which even language fell victim, a gradual reclaiming of the cultural heritage began in philosophy and history. The creator of the new language arose in the person of Stefan George (133)". A few paragraphs later Voegelin notes that the predominance of the intellect in Weber crippled his ability to act. He was therefore unable to rise to the vocation of charismatic leader that would most certainly have been his, had he wanted it. Weber was not open to the "rebirth of Eros out of the spirit of antiquity" and he rejected the "new incarnation of God", the "rebirth of the divine in a man".[33] In these three points George is Weber's antipode. He was certain of his vocation as a charismatic leader, he wished to return to the spirit awakening experience of Eros that was at the heart of Platonic

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[33] Ibid., 141. My translation differs from that of the *Collected Works*. The editors have written "Weber rejected their new incarnation of God" But there is no place for the word "their" in Voegelin's sentence. The addition of "their" makes it appear as though Weber merely rejected some one's opinion. But this is not Voegelin's point. Quite rightly the editors do not insert a "their" when they translate the passage one line above this. They translate "die Erneuerung des Eros aus dem Geist der Antike", as "the renewal of eros from the spirit of classical antiquity". This is correct because Voegelin is not discussing "their" renewal of eros. Nor is he discussing "their" new incarnation, but, like "the" renewal of eros he is discussing "the" new incarnation: "Die neue Verleiblichung des Gottes, die Wiedergeburt des Göttlichen im Menschen". Compare Eric Voegelin, "Max Weber" in: Eric Voegelin, *Die Grösse Max Webers*, edited with an afterward by Peter J. Opitz, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1995,29-48. Here, 41.

philosophy, and, in opposition to the notion of the "disenchanted world", he proclaimed the presence of the divine.

What is the significance of these points? Voegelin does not explicitly refer to the Aristotelian theme of the foundation of community in the *philia politike*, but he has described it in so many words. Through love of one's spiritual center the individual transcends the mere worldly and temporal self to participate in the ground of being. Through participation in the divine ground individuals are brought into the harmony of mind that makes common rational action possible. Specifically: with the power of Eros the charismatic individual (George) awakens his companions from life centered in passion to turn toward life centered in the spirit. Participation in the divine ground leads to the proper super-ordination and subordination of the powers of spirit and psyche and so to rationality in the comprehensive sense of the term: the rationality of ends, not just of means.

Max Weber's science does not lead to the rationality of ends. And the boundary of Weber's science corresponds to the limits of his faith. Therefore Voegelin discusses not only Weber's science but also Weber's faith, which he identifies as a private one:

> "Behind the wall of dedication to an objective, super-personal task, the intimate realm [of the soul] closes itself off. Anxieties of conscience, experiences of guilt, the despair of abandonment – such things do not belong before the public […]. We must permit the faith that certainly informed [Weber's soul], but which could not be communicated, to keep its secret" (147).

The openness of the spirit, as opposed to the closed private psyche, and the roots of public life in the *philia politike*, are the object of Voegelin's concluding remarks on George. Voegelin repeats that the nationwide public forms which were achieved in the West are missing in Germany. In their place we find the "intrinsic German form" of political harmony in the "intimate education of friends" as it is documented in the relationship between Herder and Goethe or in the circle of the Romantics. Today it is the circle around Stefan George which embodies the intrinsic German form of "rule over men and service to men" ("Herrschaft über Menschen und Dienst am Menschen"). It is no accident that these words contain the title of

Friedrich Wolters' book, *Herrschaft und Dienst*[34], in which George's spiritual politics are explained.

Voegelin's lectures of 1925 and 1930, both devoted to Max Weber, have in fact led away from Weber to Stefan George. The line upon which this movement has taken place is from the closed private psyche to the spiritual friendship which creates the public sphere through common participation in the ground of being.

A brief look at another work of Voegelin's from this period brings into focus the nature of Voegelin's rejection of Weber's notion of science. *The Theory of Governance* exists in a manuscript of 130 pages divided into three chapters.[35] The first two are fragmentary, the third, with 100 pages, is complete, with the exception of a note the author wrote to himself to include a reference to Husserl, which he did not carry out.[36]

The substantial question of a theory of governance is treated by Voegelin within the framework of two principles, one from classical philosophy and the other from Christianity. 1) The basis of rational action in community is rooted in the citizens' common participation in the divine ground. 2) The optimal rational experience of the divine ground takes place in a fundamental form of philosophizing which, since the time of Descartes, has been called „Meditation". Voegelin

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[34] Friedrich Wolters, *Herrschaft und Dienst*. Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1909.

[35] Eric Voegelin, *Herrschaftslehre*, circa 1930-1932. In: Voegelin Archive, Hoover Institution, Stanford, California, Box 55, Folder 5.Translated as "The Theory of Governance" in: Eric Voegelin, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol. 32, 224-373.

[36] The reader's experience that the text is complete as it stands is confirmed in a letter which Voegelin wrote to Edward Baumgarten on 22. 06. 1931. Voegelin points out that he has finished the chapters that contain the basis of a theory of governance and includes a table of contents containing 22 sections. In the manuscript that has come down to us two sections have been added. In the penultimate section Voegelin discusses the "state" , the *contemporary* form of the political association, but does not introduce anything principally new to the foundation of political association as such. The last section begins with the words: "Even if I do not know what more could be said in this matter, there are others who do." Ibid., 367. Here Voegelin discusses Helmuth Plessner's *Power and Human Nature*. [A copy of the Baumgarten-Voegelin correspondence can be found in the Eric Voegelin Library of the University of Erlangen.]

explicates the nature of meditation in the first chapter, examining the works of Saint Augustine, Descartes, Edmund Husserl, and Max Scheler.[37]

In the second chapter power is described in terms of man's relationship to the ground of being.

In the third chapter Voegelin rejects Max Weber's notion of governance because it does not penetrate to the spiritual experiences in which political association is constituted. Instead Weber confines himself to the theme of how an already existing political community functions (277-278).

Voegelin finds the essence of governance, as the realization of a commonly shared spiritual basis, best expressed in Friedrich Wolters' *Herrschaft und Dienst* (*Governance and Service*), – an account of the George circle, which its members understood as a "state within the state".[38] Wolters begins with the ruler (George). The ruler is the spiritually stronger person who becomes the „center" of a spiritual realm. The essence of the spirit that leads to the creation of such a realm lies in the „super-personal, community creating contents that are found by the ruler and passed on to those who serve". The ruler bears witness to the spirit and awakens in those over whom he rules the love that enables them to participate more fully in community (333-340). Despite all differences between human beings Wolters emphasizes the relative equality of the ruler and the ruled in their relationship to the spirit „in which and out of which they live" (334).

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[37] See William Petropulos, *Die Person als`' Imago Dei'. Augustine and Max Scheler in Eric Voegelin's 'Herrschaftslehre' and 'The Political Religions'*, *Occasional Papers*, IV, München: Eric-Voegelin-Archiv, June 1997. Reprinted in: Glenn Hughes ed., *The Politics of The Soul. Eric Voegelin on Religious Experience*, Lanham: Rowman &Littlefield, 1999, 87-114.

[38] "The Theory of 'Governance and Service' developed by Wolters, based on the person of [Stefan] George and on his circle, with George's works and ideas serving as his model, is the most comprehensive of those we have analyzed. It offers an inventory of core problems that require little more than minor additions. The fundamental state of the human being, from which the powers of governance emanate, is the human being's openness to divinity. This openness makes the moment of communion possible and, through this moment, the spiritual deed and the divinely inspired life of the ruler" (340).

In returning to a Platonic understanding of science and politics, mediated through the reception of Plato by Stefan George and his circle, Voegelin takes a stand against modern Western thought on governance which mistakenly interprets equality before the law as spiritual equality. Therefore, following his remarks on Wolters, Voegelin passes over recent political thought to return to the 16th century Platonist, Sir Thomas Elyot. For Elyot, the social order is based on the classification of men according to their various estates as part of the hierarchy of the cosmos. "'In all of His glorious works God has established differences of rank'". Elyot's classification of the realm of being is that of Classical antiquity and Christianity which, according to Voegelin "we still accept today (cf., for instance, Scheler's *Man's Place in the Cosmos*), even though the details of the pattern are elaborated differently in different historical periods and by different thinkers" (351).

In Elyot 's reflection:

> "on the ruler as the center and norm of his subjects' lives […] Elyot penetrates to the core of the problem of governance, as it was not done with equal clarity until Wolters – through Stefan George – found it again. The noble life and knowledge of the science of the state characterizes the ruler. Overflowing with love he bends toward the less gifted human beings in order to give their lives purpose and meaning through his example that they may imitate in service. With the splendor of governance […] he denies himself freedom in order to dedicate himself to serving those who serve" (356).

In Weber's view Plato was little more than a forerunner of modern science. In Voegelin's return to Plato the true order of community is found in the meditative experience of transcendent reality as exemplified in the parable of the cave and the contemplative tradition of Christianity.[39] The fiction of intra-mundane existence is

[39] "The distinguishing characteristic of the 'Form of Good' is that it is the transcendent source of all the reality and intelligibility of everything other than itself. Thus it is exactly what is meant in Christian philosophy by the *ens realissimum*, and is rightly regarded as distinct from and transcendent of the whole system of its effects and manifestations. And, as in the *ens realissimum* of Christian philosophers, so in the 'Form of Good' the distinction, valid everywhere else, between *essentia* and *esse*, *So-Sein* and *Sein*, falls away. In other language, it transcends the distinction, too often treated as absolute, between value and existence. It is the supreme value and the source of all other value, and at the same time it is, though 'beyond

replaced by the understanding that insight into political reality, as a part of spiritual reality, can only be gained by undergoing the „rebirth of the spirit“: the *periagoge*, or *conversio*. Only with the insight gained at the height of the meditation – in Plato’s terms, from the vision of the Idea of the Good – can one correctly interpret reality. The meditative journey does not give one "information" about the world, but concrete insight into the nature of reality that results in a re-forming of the soul.

Naturally Voegelin is aware that the Platonic paradigm does not fulfill every requirement of the modern political association. In Plato’s concept of the polis the ruler embodies the virtues more fully than the other citizens due to his greater closeness to god. In the modern world the various vocations have become differentiated. This does not change the spiritual nature of the foundation of community but it no longer puts the full burden of education on the political leaders.

After rejecting Weber’s views of the nature of governance, Voegelin identifies the principles of the *philia politike* and the problems of faith and knowledge which they involve. He is not arguing for a return to the polis but for an understanding of the spiritual foundation of political association, a theoretical reflection that principally precedes the discussion of the struggle for political power and influence within an already existing political association. The George circle was not competing for power but trying to inculcate in its members the norm of the well ordered personality as the center of the well ordered polity. This end was not pursued by laying down rules or methods but by awakening in concrete individuals the *imitatio* of the well ordered soul.[40]

This point is worth emphasizing for, in the discussion of philosophy, religion, and education, it is easy to forget that what one is talking

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being', the source of all existence". A. E. Taylor, *Plato. The Man and His Works*, London: Methuen, 1926, 289.

[40] “The circle is neither a secret order with meetings and statutes, nor a sect with fanciful rites and dogma, […] rather it consists of a small number of individuals of a particular stance and ethos, joined together though the involuntary veneration of a great individual, who strive to serve the idea which he embodies (not dictates) in a simple, objective, and serious manner, either in their every day private life or in their public office”. Gundolf, *George*, 31, footnote 1.

about is experience, not dogma, and that the means by which one makes noetic experience one's own is by imitating the character of those who embody the virtues one wishes to grow into and make one's own.

In Plato's and George's understanding of the nature of political association we no longer find ourselves in the atmosphere of the "disenchanted world" but in the cosmos of higher and lower orders of being. Politics is viewed as an activity in the service of realizing the life of virtue. For this reason the "best" have to engage in it. The virtuous soul is formed by opening to the transcendental idea of the good. The higher individual, whose spiritual gifts would enable him to engage in a life of contemplation, takes up the burden of politics in order to prevent men of less virtue from assuming power. The ruled give up the freedom that would be mere anarchy and chaos were good men unwilling to take up the burden of leadership.

Voegelin's 1925 lecture on Weber touches on the issues that Weber raised in "Science as a Vocation" and "Politics as a Vocation". But Voegelin focuses on Max Weber himself. The "disenchanted world" is overcome when Voegelin points to the world creating depths of the soul.

Voegelin's 1930 lecture retains the question concerning the soul, which he formulated in 1925, but he no longer interprets Weber as having demonically mastered fate but contrasts Weber's closed-ness to the divine ground with George's openness. The divine presence is just as much a reality in the 20th century as it was in any other. Weber's faith remains a private one. This is related to the limits Weber imposes on science. Only the knowledge of domination is accorded the status of science. On the other hand George's emphasis on man's openness to the divine ground and, as a consequence, openness to his fellow man, brings into focus the knowledge of culture, or philosophy. By awakening the experiences of the soul that lead to its proper order philosophy schools the intellect and the will to be able to judge and act in the interest of the person as a whole.

In *The Theory of Governance* we find Voegelin's specific rejection of Max Weber's presupposition of the "disenchanted world" and his return to the cosmic order of the Platonic-Christian tradition. Politics is not approached in terms of the "struggle for power", which is a

derivative and secondary phenomenon within any political association, but in terms of the roots of political order which are found in the spiritual experiences that constitute “political friendship”. We have left the realm of the fact-value dichotomy for the realm of virtue. The existence of virute obligates the human being to realize virtue.

4. Summary

Both Plessner and Voegelin take up the task of trying to find a science that will address human nature as a whole; a perspective that gets lost in value free science’s unbridgeable chasm between the "is" and the "ought". The directions they take differ fundamentally.

Plessner accepts the presuppositions of the "disenchanted world" that are the basis of Weber’s value free science. He generalizes Weber’s position into sociological terms: “society” is the realm of the realists who affirm intra-mundane existence, “community” is the realm of those who long for transcendence. The state mediates between the claims of the body and the soul. The state is "sovereign" and "god" is a function of the state. Plessner asks the rhetorical question: Why should the one who embraces the world not be as highly esteemed as the monk? But the choice is carefully prepared by first presenting those who have a relationship to transcendence as people who cannot face up to the hardness of this world and who have a corrupt notion of transcendence.

In his response to Weber Voegelin did not accept the "disenchanted world" at face value. Instead he turned his attention to the faith of the man who proclaimed it. In 1925 Weber's subjectivity was everyman's. However, five years later, it became clear to Voegelin that the soul he had praised in 1925 was not a model to be imitated, but a suffering soul to be understood. Voegelin turned to the Platonism of George, to Eros as the awakener of philosophical knowledge, to the divine ground of being as the rational basis of political order, and to the theme of religious and philosophical education, understood as the imitation of the divine embodied in a beloved model.

II. Political Science

1. Helmut Plessner: philosophical and political anthropology

Plessner's *The Limits to Community* concluded with a look at the state as the procedure that regulates the claims of community and society. The state transformed the "will to power" into the "obligation to power". This conclusion pointed to the need for a doctrine in which the concept of "power" would find its justification in human nature. Plessner turned to this task in *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch (The Levels of Organic Being and Man*), which he published in 1928.[41]

In this work Plessner approaches the human being from the perspective of the structural levels of being. The demarcation line between forms of being is explained with the help of two key concepts, "border" ("Grenze") and "positionality". The border of an inanimate thing is not an integral part of it. If a stone is chipped its substance undergoes no change. The borders of an organic being mediate between the creature and its environment. If the border is damaged the organism itself is violated. Plant, animal, and man have different relationships to their border. Whereas the plant has no center out of which it determines its relationship to the environment, the animal border is coordinated by an act center. At the level of human-being the animal center is superceded by man's "eccentric position". On the one hand the human "is" a body – as the animal is –, on the other hand, due to his ability to reflect on himself, and consider the meaning of his acts, his "center" is not in his body. By means of reflexive distance man is able to objectify himself and any potential environment; he has "world". The term "world" does not designate a place but the noetic realm of meaning.

Thus man's "eccentric position" refers to his living as the "chasm" between (and beyond) the body and the psyche. Man has "no place" ("ortlos") to stand; he is "nowhere" ("nirgends"). The being which by virtue of its eccentric position overlooks both body and psyche "is truly based on nothing".[42]

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[41] Helmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1928. Now in: Plessner, Gesammelte Schriften, Vol. IV., 2003

[42] Plessner, *The Levels of Organic Being*, 365.

Three “fundamental anthropological laws” characterize the person.

1. “Natural artificiality”. Bereft of animal instinct the “human being must first make himself into what he *is*”.[43] Since the human being is born to this state this is a “natural artificiality”. The constitutional lack of balance that the eccentric position generates means that the human being can live only in so far as he *conducts* his life. Out of human freedom culture is made.[44] Culture is an “ontic necessity”.[45]

2. The law of “mediated immediacy” is concerned with the means by which the human being adapts to the world - tools, language, knowledge, and action.

3. “The law of the utopian position: Nothingness and Transcendence”.[46] This is the “metaphysical place of the eccentric position”.[47] In recognizing the contingency of his solutions to problems that arise as he conducts his life the human being also discovers his own contingency. This awakens the idea of a counter-balancing ground of being (“Weltgrund”). However this thought is immediately undermined by the very instance that brings it forth. For the eccentric position, the chasm between body and spirit, allows no fixation, permits no standpoint in the world. And there is no world-transcending countervailing being to the creature standing on “nothing” .[48]

Regardless of what various historical epochs have thought to the contrary, there is an “absolute hostility” (“absolute Feindschaft”) between culture and religion. For in the very moment a last orientation is posited it is swept away by the movement in man’s unending creation of culture. “He who wants to return home, to his

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[43] Ibid., 383 *et passim*.

[44] Ibid., 391-392.

[45] Ibid., 396.

[46] Ibid., 419 et. sq.

[47] Vide Bernward Grünewald, “Positionalität und die Grundlegung einer philosophischen Anthropologie bei Helmuth Plessner“ in: *Realität und Begriff. Festschrift für Jakob Barion zum 95. Geburtstag*. Edited by Peter Baumanns, Würzburg: Königshausen und Neuman, 1993, 271-300. Here, 297.

[48] Plessner, *The Levels*, 419-420.

homeland, in order to find shelter, must sacrifice himself to faith. He who chooses to live by the spirit does not return".[49]

Plessner's use of metaphors in *The Levels* creates severe problems in the passages in which he discusses the specifically human.[50] For the metaphors of the "utopian standpoint", "standing nowhere", and "standing upon nothing" are made in comparisons between man and animal in regard to their common existence in the space-time-continuum. However the animal does not exist in the noetic realm of the meaning of acts and reflection on meaning. Thus when the term "positionality" is carried over into the noetic sphere, in which only the human being lives, it has lost the background against which its meaning emerged and requires additional elucidations which Plessner does not give.

Proceeding from the spatial metaphor of the human being "standing on nothing" we find, in his next work *Macht und menschliche Natur* (*Power and Human Nature*), 1931, at the noetic level, the parallel term of "unfathomable-ness" ("Bodenlosigkeit").[51] Out of human unfathomable-ness culture is produced and comes into conflict with the notion of absolute being. Almost all history has seen it differently, deriving culture and the noetic from absolute being. But, according to Plessner, based on man's "eccentric position", there can be no "standpoint" in the world and no corresponding "standpoint"

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[49] "Wer nach Hause will, in die Heimat, in die Geborgenheit, muss sich dem Glauben zum Opfer bringen. Wer es aber mit dem Geist hält, kehrt nicht zurück". Ibid.,420.

[50] "The high, typical philosophical level of abstraction of the idea of positionality, as well as its inner consistency, is impressive ("bestechend"). But whether with this a priori the entire phenomenal richness of the human being is captured, especially in regard to forms in which religiosity appear, may reasonably be doubted". Felix Hammer, "Glauben an den Menschen. Helmuth Plessners Religionskritik im Vergleich mit Max Schelers Religionsphilosophie", in: *Dilthey-Jahrbuch* (1990/91), 139-165. Here, 153.

[51] Plessner, *The Levels*, 422.424. Compare:"Macht und Menschliche Natur: Ein Versuch zur Anthropologie der geschichtlichen Weltsicht" in: *Fachzeitschriften zur Politik und staatsbürgerlichen Erziehung*, Nr. 3, Berlin 1931 ["Power And Human Nature: An Essay on the Anthropology of the Historical World View"]. Reprinted as *Macht und Menschliche Natur* in: Helmuth Plessner, *Gesammelte Schriften V*, 135-235. Here 212-214.

transcending the world. Thus the person who opts for reason does not seek a spiritual "return" to absolute being.[52]

In *Power And Human Nature*, published three years after his philosophical anthropology, Plessner tries to mobilize the middle class against the attacks of extreme ideologies. It is the same task he set for himself in *The Limits to Community*. To this end he explicates the anthropological basis from which politics can be grasped as the "necessity and the obligation to power".[53] Politics is the "artificiality" made necessary by the fact that nature has not endowed man with instinct. Through concrete decisions man transforms the anthropological "will to power" into the political "will to empowerment".[54]

Plessner's understanding of politics is the Weberian focus on power, now seen as part of the "essence of the human being".[55] Politics is something which does not just concern states and collectivities but is a form through which all aspects of life are necessarily refracted.[56] Following Carl Schmitt Plessner further determines politics to be the primal (urwüchsig) relationship between friend and enemy and asks whether this relationship is accidental or essential.[57] It is the same

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[52] The history of culture, East and West, shows that the idea of "spirit" (or "mind") and of "return" to one's origins from the dangers of death, are intimately related. Philological evidence abounds: The Greek word *noos*, "mind", is connected to the Greek verb *neomai*, "return home". Vide Douglas Frame, *The Myth of Return in Early Greek Epic*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978. Here IX.

Far from "reason" ruling out the relationship to transcendence, it necessarily implies it: "It is *reason* that follows our unrestricted desire to know to the insight that the incomplete meaning of the finite universe, if it is to be fully intelligible, must be grounded in a transcendent mystery of self-sufficient meaning. Therefore, the 'faith' that cognitively affirms and stays existentially open to the mystery of transcendent being is *reasonable*". Vide Glenn Hughes, *Transcendence And History: The Search for Ultimacy From Ancient Societies to Postmodernity*, Columbia/London: University of Missouri Press, 2003. Here 189.

[53] Plessner, *Power*, 142.

[54] Ibid., 200.

[55] Ibid., 139.

[56] Ibid., 143.

[57] Ibid.

question he posed in *The Limits to Community* of whether political order can exist without coercion. There Plessner looked at community and society, concluded that both were necessary, and determined that society cannot exist without force. In *Power* the answer is the same. But here question and answer have been moved from the sociological realm to the sphere of human nature.

In Plessner "power" and "life" become one, for the human being, in analogy to the state, is a "procedure", not a substance. His life is his power. In the moment that this power rises from its unfathomable depths to create something it also moves on to the next expression of "life" (i.e., "power").

Plessner argues that the human being is the source of all systems that transcend time.[58] From such a standpoint one does not set one's own culture as an "absolute measure". Plessner is aware that this position, and the other fundamental ones he has taken in *Power* – all of which revolve around the concept of man as "unfathomable", of his "standing on nothing", of "life" as "power" – are the result of an understanding of human nature reached by Western man. Without giving any details Plessner traces the tradition of this view of man from Ancient Greece and Christianity through Humanism and the Reformation.[59] The West must remain conscious of the relative perspective of its own culture and of the relative perspectives of all cultures.[60] It is man who creates "systems of reality": god, nature, law, art, and science.[61] In giving up the view of its own culture as absolutely valid the West gains the key to understanding all culture as man made and puts itself ahead of all other cultures that have not attained this insight. "By cutting loose from itself Europe triumphs".[62]

Plessner is aware that this view of man runs the risk of eroding the very foundations of the civilization in which it emerged. Therefore, he argues, it will be necessary to train and educate an elite that will continue to work on the problem of culture from the perspective of

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[58] Ibid., 148.
[59] Ibid., 218-219.
[60] Ibid., 159.
[61] Ibid., 182.
[62] Ibid., 164.

man's "unfathomable-ness". This understanding of life was developed in German language philosophy. In order for this point of view to succeed against competing ones, it will be necessary to protect the German language, the prosperity of the educated class that embraces that view of man, and the welfare of the German people as a whole who, in an "affinity of blood" ("bluthafte Affinität"), identify with it.[63]

In this connection Plessner reminds the reader that where history is understood as an open question and no longer viewed as something guided by god, a nation is only necessary as long as it makes itself necessary.[64] Thus the task of national politics is self-assertion. In Plessner's eyes this belligerent sounding program is softened by the consideration that all nations are part of universal humanity. Plessner believes that this fact will lead to a type of political competition that will be less brutal than past struggles in which each nation posited itself and its culture absolutely.[65]

Between 1924 and 1931 Plessner systematized Max Weber's "disenchanted world" and "mundane perspective": in regard to social forms in *The Limits to Community*, in regard to human nature in *The Levels of Organic Being*, and in regard to politics in *Power and Human Nature*.

In Weber science served as a negative criterion for action: In revealing the structure of the world it indicated the framework of rational decision making, even if, within this framework, it could not give a positive recommendation for one course of action over another. Science gained the position of the arbiter *ex negativo* among those who held that the orientation to god or true being was based on illusion. In Plessner human nature itself embodies all the conditions that lead to "intellectual rationalization": the "disenchanted world" becomes the symbol of the spiritual lot of universal humanity, to consider the human being philosophically is to adopt the "mundane perspective".

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[63] Ibid., 219.
[64] Ibid., 232.
[65] Ibid., 233.

The nationalist framework of Weber's science is repeated in Plessner. His notion of the method of cultural studies, human nature, and politics fit into a schema in which "power", or "life", are the key words. It rests on an academic tradition that emerged from secularized German Protestantism. By letting go of its absolutes Plessner's Germany triumphs. Like Weber[66] Plessner seeks a way for Germany to regain the cultural status she lost at the end of World War One:

> "Despite his earlier rejection of the state's aggressive power politics, Plessner adheres [in 1931-WP] to a more humanitarian and realistic variant of Germany's claim to the right to assert its power. By utilizing the more humanitarian concept of power, founded on the German cultural and scientific tradition, he reckons, especially, with the support of the historically conscious German elite.[67]

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[66] In 1925 Voegelin quoted Weber's views on Germany following World War One: "How deeply Max Weber felt the link with his national community is evident in the collection of political essays and letters drafted during the war. Their content ranges from a lament at the beginning of the war that he had been unable to participate in combat at the front, all the way to the gripping letter of November 1918, addressed to Crusius, which concludes: '110 years ago, we showed the world that we – and *only* we – could, under foreign rule, be one of the great cultured peoples. We will do it once again! Then history, which has already granted to us — and *only* to us – a second youth, will grant us yet a third. I have no doubt about this […]' ". Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 7, 109-110.

[67] Kerstin Schüsler, *Helmuth Plessner: Eine Intellektuelle Biographie*, Berlin/Wien: Philo, 2000. Here, 117. Vide the literature in footnotes 552 and 553.

2. Voegelin's Review of Power and Human Nature

Voegelin's review of *Power and Human Nature* underlines the differences between the two thinkers' response to Max Weber.[68]

> "Plessner does not develop an idea of political reality either expressly or in its whole breadth. Instead he appears to consider its content as self-evident to everyone and limits himself to the clarification of a few major points […].[69]

Plessner "holds the German situation, on which he bases his conception, to be a general European one"[70]. Voegelin questions Plessner's assumption that the Christian idea of the equality of all humans before God is a "positive reality" in the current political situation:

> "It is said that the political relevant discovery for our time is 'that we, as opposed to the non-Christian peoples, have developed the concept of 'humanity', and a view of reality that is indifferent to religious and racial distinctions.' Our religious sentiment leads us to believe in the 'equality before God of all those who bear a human countenance.' In this light, humans, cultures, states, religions, and arts are relativized, and we discover the human as 'the productive *agency* for the emergence of culture.' Human beings are responsible for the world in which they live. They should be regarded as the creator of culture within the horizon of their history. To become a human being means to become conscious of and accept one's own destiny".[71]

Voegelin sees other factors as being at least as important: "Does Plessner want to deny completely the political relevance of the ideas of race, the leader, and dictatorship?" To Voegelin, in contemporary Europe, the "Christian idea" seems to be submerged under the "division of human beings into rabble and elites".

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[68] Erich Voegelin, Review of *Macht und menschliche Natur. Versuch zur Anthropologie der geschichtlichen Weltansicht* von Helmuth Plessner, Berlin: Junker and Dünnhaupt, 1931. *Kölner Vierteljahrshefte für Soziologie* 10 (1931), 255-257. Translated and Reprinted in: Eric Voegelin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 13. *Selected Book Reviews*. Edited and translated by Jodi Cockerill and Barry Cooper with an Introduction by Barry Cooper, Columbia/London: University of Missouri Press, 2001, 38-41.

[69] Ibid., 38.

[70] Ibid., 39.

[71] Ibid., 39-40.

Another important point which Voegelin touches on is related to what I noted above, the schematism and the metaphors which allow Plessner to glide from one level of being, and from one object of reflection, to another. Voegelin notes:

> "That the concept of 'life' is applied without qualification to existences of all types, personal and individual human existence as well as collective existence. I consider this breadth of meaning to be inappropriate because a whole range of problems concerning the inter-human constitution of a supra-personal, social existence is not considered. For example the problem of ruler-ship disappears, not, as Plessner appears to believe, because it does not fit into his investigation, but because one cannot include it at all on the basis of his concept of life. Nor is the fundamentally important analysis of the friend-enemy problem very successful. Here the leap from the horizons of intimacy and increasing degrees of enmity is made in just one sentence".[72]

In summation Voegelin finds that Plessner's political view is difficult to criticize because he "does not justify his odd selection of relevant constituent elements"[…]. But "criteria of relevance must be included in the fundamentals of political philosophizing".[73]

What Voegelin understands by the term "criteria of relevance" in studies of political order was developed in *The Theory of Governance*: "The determination of that which a person essentially is takes place, when the attempt is made with adequate means, in a fundamental form of philosophical thinking" called meditation.[74] In the meditation the individual explores all realms of being with the intention of overcoming mere worldly being in order to enter into living contact with the ground of existence. The spirit in its contact with the divine ground is the real life of the person. For this reason the experience of the meditation cannot be translated into "information" for the person who does not undertake the meditation himself.

What we "know" about the human being when we turn from the noetic experience gained in meditation, to modes of knowledge concerned with the world of objects, is not fundamental. In the "objectifying mode of thought" statements about the human being

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[72] Ibid., 41.

[73] Ibid., 40.

[74] Voegelin, *The Theory of Governance*, 226f. Vide 244f.

are mere conjecture because they do not emanate from the only real experience we have of the human being, which is made in spiritual acts.[75] Voegelin's insight has far reaching implications for a theory of politics:

> "In our view a theory of human existence, if it is to be good, considers the movements of thought in which existence, in its constitution, can originarily be given to itself and explains the same continuous structure of existence for life's entire course. Only the first part of the theory yields real knowledge by pointing the way to an evident giving of the self to the self (*Selbstgebung*) in concrete existence; not however in the form in which objects are given to us in experience, but in existence illuminating and manifesting itself to itself (*existenzverdeutlichendes Darleben der Existenz*). Generally the second part consists in the more or less successful attempt to rationally present the temporal course of existence as a continuum, i.e., as the life revealed in the existential self-giving. In principle these attempts are doomed to failure because they treat human existence as an object, like a thing we can perceive. In reality human existence cannot be grasped in an objectifying mode of thought, but only in the existential movement of thought in which it becomes present to itself".[76]

In addition to his review of *Power and Human Nature* Voegelin also discusses the work in *The Theory of Governance*, where he augments the criticism expressed in the review. In dealing with the political association as a whole "we cannot meditatively arrive at the point where this existence, in its original structure, is given to us in experience. For the existence of the whole is not an existence that can be given to itself in actual experience […].[77] Plessner "is unaware of any difficulties involved" in applying such analogies to "the existence of the whole".[78]

In Voegelin's view, the "criteria of relevance" for a political theory are found in the spiritual experiences in which community is constituted. In order to explain the nature of these experiences, in *The Theory of Governance* Voegelin returned to Christian and Platonic insights into the nature of noetic acts, discussing the thought of the Platonists Friedrich Wolters (Stefan George) and Sir Thomas

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[75] Ibid., 286-287.

[76] Ibid., 287.

[77] Ibid., 367.

[78] Ibid., 368.

Elyot. In his next works Voegelin would reflect on the nature of Platonic politics in regard to the situation in Germany. Following an examination of the origins of Voegelin's Platonism in the circle around Stefan George I will discuss Voegelin's science of politics as it is expressed in his two books on race.

3. Plato and Stefan George

The view of Plato which we find in the circle around Stefan George begins with George himself. First, it was George who encouraged his friends and disciples to engage in the study of Plato. Second, it was George's conception of himself, and his understanding of the nature of his circle, that served as models for his friends' research into the nature of the relationship between Socrates and Plato, and the nature of Plato's circle in the Academy.

The George circle did not see the poet as someone whose love for Hellas had been acquired by learning, but as a person who understood the ancient world because he had access to the same divine-cosmic forces which had animated it:

> "When we say that George is a figure of the ancient world, as is no other person in our day, […] we do not refer to classical meters (which he never uses), nor to the glorification of Hellas, nor to his broad knowledge of antiquity: were we to refer to such things as these we would have to call inveterate modern protestants like Mommsen and Wilamowitz figures of antiquity. George is not a figure of the ancient world […] because of this or that detail, but by virtue of the one great will that enables us to identify all of classical antiquity from Homer to Augustus – through all of its thousands of circumstances and forms – as one common 'world', and divides it from the 'worlds' that went before it and those which followed: the *divinization of the body* and the *incarnation of god*".[79]

In the *Theory of Governance* Voegelin wrote that "Friedrich Wolters' theory, "based on the person of Stefan George […] is the most comprehensive of those we have analyzed".[80] This work was the model which guided George's companions in their research into Plato. As Kurt Hildebrandt wrote:

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[79] Friedrich Gundolf, *George*, Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1922, 39.

[80] Voegelin, *The Collected Works*, Vol. 32, 340.

> "Before we were able to become fully conscious of the creative and educational (menschenformende) power of poetry, Friedrich Wolters, in 1909, in *Governance and Service*, had to bring to light, in a grand and convincing fashion, the forgotten truth that it is the vocation of the poet to revivify a dead world and to found a new 'spiritual empire'. Once this level of understanding had been reached it became possible to produce a series of works on Plato out of the new ethos".[81]

The most important of these works, and fundamental for the George circle, was *Platon: Seine Gestalt*[82] by Heinrich Friedemann. Kurt Hildebrandt's *Platon: Der Kampf des Geistes um die Macht*[83] "brought the George circle's interpretation of Plato thematically and chronologically to an end".[84] The George circle saw in Plato the person who, after his failure to achieve actual political power, devoted his energies to educating the young in the Academy. He matured well beyond his original intentions to become the "founder of a new spiritual empire", a "savior" and "redeemer"[85].

Behind this notion of Plato's religious mission is a religious experience of George himself. The poet found his spiritual-political calling in his pedagogical relationship to, and friendship with, a young man who, following his early death, George celebrated as "Maximin". George met Maximin at a time when he himself was lost and spiritually isolated:

> "Du kamst am letzten tag
> Da ich von harren siech
> Da ich des betens müd
> Mich in die nacht verlor"[86]

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[81] Kurt Hildebrandt, "Das neue Platonbild", in: *Blätter für Deutsche Philosophie*, 4 (1930/31), 193. A chronology of the works on Plato produced by the George circle can be found in: Ernst Eugen Starke, *Das Platon-Bild des George-Kreises*, Dissertation, Univ. Köln, 1957, 11-20.

[82] Heinrich Friedemann, *Platon. Seine Gestalt*, Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1914.

[83] Kurt Hildebrandt, *Platon. Der Kampf des Geistes um die Macht*. Berlin: Blätter für die Kunst Verlag, 1933.

[84] Starke, *Das Platon-Bild*, 16.

[85] Hildebrandt, *Platon*, 248.

[86] "You came on the last day/ When, ill with waiting/ Wearied by prayer,/ I lost myself in darkness". So in one of the first poems concerning the poet's meeting with "Maximim". Vide *Der Siebente Ring* in: Stefan George, *Werke*. I., 225-342. Here 279.

The experience with Maximin, the "incarnation of the god" ("Verleibung des Gottes") became the center of George's understanding of himself and of his mission as spiritual-political renovator:

> "Da tauchst du Gott vor mir empor ans land
> Dass ich von dir ergriffen dich nur schaue,
> Dein erdenleib dies enge heiligtum
> Die spanne kaum für eines arms umfassen
> Fängt alle sternenflüchtigen gedanken
> Und bannt mich in den tag für den ich bin".[87]

The relationship of George to the divine, the relationship of disciples and friends to George, and the circle as the center of Germany's spiritual-political renewal, are the main elements of the George circle's understanding of Plato.

Friedrich Gundolf has summarized this interpretation. Every god creates a new cosmos and a new world view. Where a vision of god comes to a man of will it is concentrated into a "human order, that is, to an empire". Every true understanding of the world contains an immediate "ought" . The "birth of morality out of the theory of the world (Weltschau)" is most clearly seen in Plato. "Virtue is knowledge" does not mean that one first makes clear to one self what the right thing to do is, and then does it. Insight into being and action is given in the immediate vision of the order of the world. One can only see "what and insofar as one *is*". Plato knows neither an ethic that is abstracted from the vision of the world nor a science separated from the true and the beautiful. He knows a true order of the world by "virtue of illuminated intuition", and his so-called "ethical will" is the "passion to see the true order realized by his fellow man". His "scientific method" is his means of demonstrating that order so that those who grasp it will, by immediate insight, "be right" themselves. It was later ages that tore asunder what had been a unity and created a "metaphysics without body" and a "physics without soul". They

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[87] "You appear before me, a god on earth/ Seized by the vision I see only you,/ Your earthen body, this slender sanctuary,/ Slim enough for one arm to embrace/ Captures the thoughts that would flee to the stars/ And binds me to the day for which I was made". George, *Der Stern des Bundes*, Düsseldof/Munich: Helmut Küpper, Vormals George Bondi, n.d., 11. "Compare Gundolf: "In the middle of his life George found the human being whose beauty, strength, fervor, purity, depth, simplicity, nobility, comeliness, and dignity called to mind all that history had ever offered and that the future could promise". *George*, 207.

destroyed man's perception of the god filled cosmos that contains our "ought" and which, by virtue of Eros, the cosmic power of love, is revealed to the higher human being.[88]

The importance of the George circle's influence on Voegelin's understanding of Plato has been emphasized by Voegelin himself. In his *Autobiographical Reflections* he writes that it was the "work of the classical scholars belonging to the circle of Stefan George[…]beginning with the work of Heinrich Friedemann, who was killed in World War I, on Plato, which was continued by Paul Friedländer's and Kurt Hildebrandt's work on Plato, that became fundamental for my own studies, which were continued in their spirit".[89] In 1951 Leo Strauss wrote to Voegelin, obviously taking up a judgment that Voegelin had already stated: "You are entirely right, George understood more about Plato than Wilamowitz, Jaeger, and the entire guild".[90]

As Socrates was the spiritual experience that changed Plato's life and awakened his vocation for philosophy, and around whose spirit he organized the Academy, so Maximin became the center around which George wished to create a new spiritual-political community:

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[88] Gundolf, *George*, 243-244.

[89] Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, edited with an Introduction by Ellis Sandoz, Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1989, 16-17.

[90] Letter from Strauss to Voegelin from 4 June, 1951 in: *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence Between Leo Strauss und Eric Voegelin, 1934-1964*. Translated and edited by Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 88-91. Here 90. Hans Georg Gadamer has also emphasized how George, and the George circle, served as models for the research into Plato undertaken by members of the circle. Concerning *Platon: Der Kampf des Geistes um die Macht*, he writes: Hildebrandt's "own experience in the relationship of disciple to master and his participation in the educational influence (bildende Wirkung) that the poet had on his younger friends, allowed him to rediscover a great deal that is important in the platonic dialogs". Hans Georg Gadamer, "Die Wirkung Stefan Georges auf die Wissenschaft", in: Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 9, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983, 258-270. Here 269.

"Der gott ist das geheimnis höchster weihe
Mit strahlen rings erweist er seine reihe:
Der sohn aus sternenzeugung stellt ihn dar
Den neue Mitte aus dem geist gebar".[91]

In his next works Voegelin affirmed the spiritual-political intention of the George circle.

4. The Body Idea of the George circle: Voegelin and the Idea of Race

Voegelin's manuscript on race was published in 1933 in two separate volumes.[92] *Race and State* deals with the science and the political idea of race. *The History of the Race Idea from Ray to Carus* investigates body ideas (*Leibideen*) as "one of the elements out of which communities are created". Well known examples of body ideas are the mystical body of Christ, Socrates, Alexander, Caesar, Goethe, and Napoleon. They reveal archetypal forms (Urformen) of human nature and are not ideas of mere physical nature.

In the modern world, especially in Germany, the body idea of race has become thematic. But whereas all body ideas are at the same time mythical ideas, the contemporary world, due to its clinging to the superstition that only natural science offers insight into reality, attempts to legitimize the idea of race with causal explanations based on physical science. But body ideas are not ideas of the physical body. The spiritual meaning of body ideas may be demonstrated with the example of family identity. If one considers one's progenitors over the last four generations, one has descended from eight females and eight males. However one's name derives from only one of these sixteen individuals. That is because the body idea of the family is an

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[91] "God is the mystery's highest consecration / With shining rings he reveals his rank:/ He is embodied in the son born of stars / The new center created out of the spirit". George, *Der Stern*, 16. Vide also 25.

[92] Erich Voegelin, *Rasse und Staat*, Tübingen: J.C.B Mohr (Siebeck), 1933. Translated as *Race and State* in: *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol. 2, edited with and introduction by Klaus Vondung, 1999. Erich Voegelin, *Die Rassenidee in der Geistesgeschichte von Ray bis Carus*, Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt, 1933. Translated as *The History of the Race Idea: From Ray to Carus* in: *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol. 3, edited with an introduction by Klaus Vondung, 1999.

element of the spiritual-historical world and not an element of the natural world. For information on one's biological makeup one would have to consider the genetic material of all sixteen progenitors.

In order to explain the spiritual and mythical nature of body ideas Voegelin refers to Othmar Spann who developed his concept from Schelling. The creation of a race and the changes it undergoes is a spiritual fact and not the work of genetic laws:

> "'It is the great founders of religions, sages, and rulers who impart to their peoples new religious life and profoundly inspiring warlike heroic spirits and who deeply stir up their feelings for life. It is they who also give new impetus to racial formation, and thus succeed in changing the natural image of man (das stammliche Artbild). The spiritual history of archetypal humanity (Urmenschheit) is primarily religious history. It was Schelling who endeavored to explain race formation from this standpoint'".[93]

According to Schelling it is not by living together, engaging in trade, or by having a common legal order, that people come together as a nation or state. Prior to these aspects a consciousness of community must exist. The myth itself constitutes the ground of being (Seinsgrund) that unites individuals into a people. Schelling speaks of myth as a part of a theogonic process.

In Voegelin's view the theogonic process is subjective in so far as it takes place in a consciousness and is revealed in the creation of ideas (Vorstellungen). However the sources (Ursprüngen) and the "objects" of these ideas are objective, they are the forces that are actually at work. Schelling's doctrine of the myth as the nations' ground of being is the original insight into "the religious nature[…]of all community formation". In its methodological principles this doctrine is "equally valid for the formation of community today".[94]

Among Voegelin's contemporaries it was George and his circle who shared Schelling's view, and with the practical intention of renewing Germany. Community is created in a spiritual act in which primal images are embodied in an exemplary person. Through *imitatio* the spiritual qualities of the exemplary person become the formative

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[93] *Race and State*, 113. The quotation from Spann: Othmar Spann, *Gesellschaftslehre* Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 3rd ed. 1930, 359.

[94] Voegelin, *Race and State*, 151.

powers that bind individuals into community. This doctrine is explained by Gundolf in a discussion of Hölderlin and George:

"First, one must know the god, only then can one know the community and the people. The nations are created by the gods. From biblical times to Hölderlin every sage has known this and therefore, at one and the same time, has called upon both god and the people".[95]

Gundolf first develops this thought in regard to Hölderlin, but immediately relates it to George[96]. He who "breathes" within the Odem of a god, and thereby within a community, becomes its sage and prophet. Prophecy emerges when one becomes aware of the godly powers in the depths of one's soul. George ordered his life around Maximin's mystical "Gestalt" and "created[…]an earthly community around the godly center".

The theogonic process described by Spann in reference to Schelling, by Gundolf in reference to Hölderlin and George, and which Voegelin affirms as principally true today, is the basis for the George circle's faith in its mission.[97] George:

> "has been invested with the task of every true poet, of recovering the divine, of reclaiming the Gestalt, the image and harmony, in conversion and contemplation, to take us out of this most hollow of times, the absence of the divine, the greatest distance from god that has ever been".[98]

Voegelin's participation in the hopes of the George circle, that the divine can be recovered and the human being led out of the godlessness of the times to a "true image" of man, is evident in *The History of the Race Idea*. Voegelin points out that in more fortunate times body ideas were witnessed in visions of primal images (urbildliche Schau). At the present time the idea of race, a

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[95] Gundolf, *George*, 242.

[96] Gundolf, George, 242.

[97] For Gundolf's description of the theogonic process in regard to Hölderlin, vide his inaugural lecture at the university of Heildelberg in 1910, "Hölderlins Archipelagus". Reprinted in: Friedrich Gundolf, *Dem Lebendigen Geist. Aus Reden, Aufsätzen und Büchern.* Selected by Dorthea Berger and Marga Frank, with a Foreword by Erich Berger. Heidelberg/Darmstadt: L. Schneider, 1962, 26-40. For the connection between Hölderlin and George, Ibid., 38 and Gundolf, *George*, 216.

[98] Ibid., 250.

contemporary form of the body idea, is in a state of decline because the spiritual manner of seeing primal images has been lost. Men have turned from the contemplation of primal images to imitate the methods of natural science. But such methods, developed for the investigation of phenomena, cannot penetrate to spiritual substance.

The biologically based notion of race repeats the errors of liberalism and Marxism. It tries to identify what is human on the basis of external bodily characteristics. Unlike liberalism and Marxism, the biological doctrine of race does not view all that has a human countenance as human, but limits the truly human to the members of one race. Nevertheless all three doctrines confine themselves to physical phenomena. On the other hand, the spiritual doctrine of race works with the image of the entire human being in which the spirit finds expression, and which is only given in intuition (intellektuelle Schau). In the following passage Voegelin formulates his position in a style that recalls Gundolf and Wolters because it takes up the thoughts of both:

> "That the community of noble blood finds itself through the relationship of noble spirits, that the community is governed by its own laws through which the members find and recognize each other, laws of leadership and obedience, of distance and closeness to the center, of devotion and self-reliance, of radiant enchantment, and its acceptance without envy – to know all this and much more requires a primal way of seeing in which the full image of the human being is revealed".[99]

According to Voegelin there is no mediation between primal images. Each one brings forth a seen reality. But Voegelin is interested in a particular "primal way of seeing", namely that in which the "full image of the human being is revealed". What Voegelin understands by this term can be seen in his discussion of Carl Gustav Carus' remarks concerning the "primal image" embodied by Goethe, in which the "incarnation of the spirit" ("die Verleiblichung des Geistes") is revealed. Again Voegelin finds the principle in Plato: "Only where a spiritual norm gives order to human beings ("in Zucht

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[99] Voegelin, *The History of the Race Idea*, 24.

"The influence of my schooling by the style of the *Stefan-George-Kreis* can still be discerned…in my first books, […] especially in *Die Rassenidee in der Geistesgeschichte von Ray bis Carus*. Regaining language meant recovering the subject matter to be expressed by language […]". Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 17.

hält") and brings them together in harmony can great history take place; for all time Plato has established the law of the reciprocal and mutually supporting claims of the noble body and the noble spirit".[100]

What Voegelin describes is the position of the George circle:

> "Where a primordial, god seeking, human being embodies a vision of the divine and an image of the world, the Platonic circle is repeated, from faith – that is by virtue of the blood, by virtue of the beautiful life – to love, from love to vision, and from vision to will, which only awakens a response in contemporary and future human beings who also embody the same "virtue of blood".[101]

In view of Voegelin's references to Plato, his adoption of the George circle's concept of "noble blood", and in his affirmation of the hierarchy of human types, it is clear that in *The History of the Race Idea* Voegelin writes for and about a small group that constitutes the pinnacle of hierarchically structured society. Voegelin sets his hopes in a spiritual elite that will overcome the errors of liberalism, Marxism, and the biological-materialistic idea of race, which do not penetrate to the noetic core of the human being. However the prerequisites for the recognition of such an elite are not yet present. He laments that from Schiller's idea of the "select circle" and Goethe's idea of the "small group", nothing remains. And "George's doctrine of the spiritual empire has not been understood". Instead, out of the dominance of the materialist idea of race the dangerous thought has emerged:

> "that the historical substance can be produced at will by industrious organizations for the breeding of racially pure bodies […]. It is a nightmare to think that we should recognize the people whom we follow and whom we allow to grow close to us not by their glance, their speech, and their comeliness, ("am Blick, am Wort und an der Gebärde") but by their cranial index and the measured proportions of their extremities."[102]

Voegelin's intention in *The History of the Race Idea* to renew the "primal ways of seeing" is not just a scientific goal. He does not wish to merely expand the "horizon of science" ("Wissen-schaftshorizont"), but also pursues the scientific-practical goal ("wissenschaftspraktisches Ziel") of reformulating the "foundations

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[100] *History of the Race Idea*, 23.

[101] Gundolf, *George*, 244.

[102] Ibid., 24-25.

of the primal and thought images" that have been forgotten. Like George it is Voegelin's intention to teach his contemporaries to see the primal image of "noble blood", the basis of the "noble community" that constitutes itself out of the "relationship of noble spirits".

The task of awakening this primal way of seeing will not be easy. But he, "who in matters of the spirit makes it easy for himself, has no right to be heard".[103] This sentence ends Voegelin's "Introduction" to *The History of the Idea of Race* in which he outlines the book's scientific and practical purpose. It is a quote from Friedrich Gundolf. But Voegelin does not put it in quotation marks, presumably because those who he wishes to address recognize one another "am Blick, am Wort und am Gebärde". Or, as George expresses the same thought:

> "Neuen Adel den ihr suchet
> Führt nicht her von schild und krone!
> […]
> Stammlos wachsen im gewühle
> Seltene sprossen eignen ranges
> Und ihr kennt die mitgeburten
> An der augen wahrer glut"[104]

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[103] ""Wer es sich in geistigen Dingen leicht macht, der hat nicht mitzureden". *Die Geschichte der Rassenidee*, 23.

[104] "The new nobility you seek/ Is not found in crown or coat of arms/ […] Nameless, and out of the masses, grow/ Rare sons of equal rank/ And you know your brothers/ By the honest fervor in their eyes". George, *Der Stern*, 85. Compare: "Antliz und wuchs weist euch den Echten aus"./ "You will know who is genuine by his face and stature". Ibid., 99. "Aus jedes aug erriet sich hier sein grad"./ "The rank of each individual is revealed in his glance". Ibid., 110.

5. Plessner's Review of Race and State.

Race and State and *The History of The Race Idea from Ray to Carus*, appeared at the beginning of 1933, just as the National Socialists assumed power in Germany. Plessner reviewed *Race and State* from his exile in Holland.[105] He praises the fact that, in contrast to thinkers committed to political liberalism, Voegelin realizes that there is a racial question (Rassenfrage), and not just a racial madness (Rassenwahn). The political liberal, with his focus on developing a tolerant society, has no eye for physical and psychical differences. Human nature is "functionalized" and "formalized" in order to insure that such differences do not enter the political discussion. Plessner emphasizes that Voegelin's opposition to this view is not an opposition to the humanitarian idea behind liberalism. Rather Voegelin objects to liberalism's inability to come to grips with the problem of differences among human beings.

This inability leaves the matter of race in the hands of fanatics. Nevertheless, despite all of their errors, the fanatics are right in maintaining that there is a racial question. Racial thought in Germany at the turn of the century drew inadequately on the biological sciences for support. The current generation of racial theorists has jettisoned every idea of empirical control, however flimsy, and speaks of the "intuitive-organic truth" of its doctrine, openly confessing its subjectivity. Thus, "Voegelin sees correctly that only a new philosophy of man can provide the pre-requisite for changing this scientifically disgraceful and politically dangerous situation". Voegelin's efforts to understand the idea of race are in accord with similar efforts in the field of philosophical anthropology to grasp the human being in his totality. [106]

Plessner notes Voegelin's distinction between "race theory" and the "idea of race". The former is the scientific attempt to explain the phenomena, the latter is a form of the body idea, such as the *corpus mysticum Christi*. It is the "mythical" body idea that plays a role in a community's understanding of itself. Plessner endorses Voegelin's view, informed by F. J. Clauß and Othmar Spann, that "race" is a

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[105] Helmut Plessner, Review of *Rasse und Staat* von Erich Voegelin, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1933. *Zeitschrift für öffentliches Recht*, 14, no. 3 (1934), 407-414.

[106] Ibid., 408.

category of expression, the "style" of a particular spiritual, psychical, and bodily unity. This position, which understands race as a symbol of the whole human being, and not just of his somatic elements, is a bulwark against the biologistic ideas and theories of race favored by the new regime in Germany.

Plessner also endorses Voegelin's position that there is no way to speak of a "pure race" without first assuming a "norm" by which it is to be defined. This is always a spiritual norm since what is at issue is the entire human being, not just his somatic structure. Once one has grasped the spiritual nature of the norm one can understand that every people has its own norm of "nobility". Any "somatic type" can be raised to a higher level of existence, not just the so-called "Nordic race".

Plessner believes that it is the task of the state to educate its people, in all their somatic diversity, to an ideal of nobility. Indeed, according to Plessner, the value of a state lies in its ability to form heterogeneous elements into the unity of a single political style. He believes that this integration ideal accounts for the triumphs of Rome, France, Spain, and England. By appealing to the "imagination", these political associations integrated various nations into one *Staatsvolk*. Plessner closes with the warning that a state which tries to understand people by means of animal categories may well succumb to bestiality itself.

6. Summary

The theme of value free science finds its place in Voegelin's and Plessner's thoughts on race. The norm that must guide any attempt at developing a noetic idea of race must be a value idea. But Voegelin does not engage in the discussion of "values" as Weber does. He goes beyond this position by returning to the idea of the "noble spirit" realized in the "noble body". Through *imitatio* , not by value judgments, one enters into the norm by changing oneself.

Plessner’s observation that Voegelin’s attempt to understand race as the spiritual expression of the composite human being accords with efforts to develop a philosophical anthropology, should not be taken to mean that philosophical anthropology and the theory of race are engaged in the same task. The point of convergence between an idea

of race based on Plato-George and Plessner's philosophical anthropology is found in the fact that both wish to overcome the ideas of man which divide human nature into a *res cogitans* and *a res extensa*. Philosophical anthropology and the spiritual idea of race are both interested in the human being in his unity. But the spiritual idea of race is concerned with concrete norms, Plessner's philosophical anthropology is concerned with the structure of the human being, this includes his norm-potential, but makes no statement regarding the desirability of a specific norm.

In *The Theory of Governance* Voegelin develops a science of human nature and political association. In his two books on race he applies these insights to the German situation. Voegelin's political science overcomes the presuppositions of value free science by showing: 1) that an empirical social science does not get to the heart of political order, 2) that a return to the knowledge of culture and salvation is not a reintroduction of "value judgments", but a return to spiritual experience, and 3) that the rationality of spiritual experience lies in the individual's ability to consider all levels of being, including the world transcendent. The soul gains its order by opening itself to the transcendent (divine) norm, a way of life.

Plessner, on the other hand, does not return to the forms of cultural and salvational knowledge. Instead he tries to legitimize the presuppositions of value free science with a theory of human nature. The "mundane perspective" is systematized into a philosophical anthropology. Man stands on "nothing". The forces which erupt through man from his "unfathomable-ness" reveal man to be a process of power, creating and destroying. The political sphere is absorbed into the theme of power and man's other qualities are reduced to contingencies. As a result, humanitarian society is no more an expression of "man's nature" than a inhumane society is.[107]

Plessner's and Voegelin's theoretical positions are fully developed by 1933. In addition, Plessner, in *Power and Human Nature*, and Voegelin in *The History of the Race Idea*, pursue the pedagogical goal of appealing to elements in German society to work for a new spiritual-political order. Behind Plessner's notion is the idea of a

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[107] Compare Helmuth Plessner, "Das Problem der Unmenschlichkeit" in: Plessner, *Diesseits der Utopie. Ausgewählte Beiträge zur Kultursoziologie*, Düsseldorf/Cologne, 1966 221-229. Reprinted in *Gesammelte Schriften*, VIII, 328-338.

political elite that, cutting itself loose from all absolutes, will take a leading position in the recovery of Germany's position in Europe, and Europe's position in the world.[108] Voegelin's orientation to the George circle affirms the notion of an educational elite who, with their understanding that religious experience is at the center of community, will awaken wider and wider circles to the need for the conversion to spirit. Here too, the George circle focused on Germany, not in a narrow nationalistic manner, but as the first step toward European spiritual renewal.[109]

Plessner's and Voegelin's analyses were concerned with the ongoing crisis of Western society. Both understood that the problem of the erosion of faith and community had its origins in earlier centuries, and both criticized the state of politics in Germany before the advent of National Socialism. As we saw in Plessner's review of *Race and State*, both Voegelin's and Plessner's critique is aimed at all political ideologies that fail to grasp man as a composite being organized by his spiritual nature. However, the triumph of National Socialism put an end to free discussion in Germany and to the pedagogical hopes that Plessner and Voegelin had for improving its political culture.

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[108] For details vide Schüßler, *Helmuth Plessner*, 117-123.

[109] For Voegelin's view of the George circle, and its vision of spiritual renewal, vide "Nietzsche, The Crisis, and the War" in: *Journal of Politics*, 6 (1944), 177-212. Reprinted in: *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol. 10, *Published Essays* 1940-1952, edited with an Introduction by Ellis Sandoz, Columbia/London: University of Missouri Press, 2000, 126-156. See especially 140-141, 144-146, and footnotes 43, 48-51.

III. Exile and Exodus

1. Helmuth Plessner

Plessner was dismissed from the University of Cologne in the first months after the new regime took power and went into exile in Holland. With the German invasion in 1940 his life changed again. Classified by the Nazis as a "half-Jew", by 1943 he had to go into hiding in order to avoid being deported and murdered.

In 1935 Plessner published *The Fate of the German Mind at the end of its Bourgeois Epoch,*[110] and in 1937 "The Task of Philosophical Anthropology"[111], his 1936 Inaugural Lecture at the University of Groningen.

In the first work Plessner takes up the questions that concerned him in *The Limits:* Germany's lack of a binding socio-political tradition, its difference from the West in this regard, and the opportunity this gives Germany to be at the forefront of the modern world, since modernity is characterized by the increasing pace of the destruction of tradition.

All of Germany's political and intellectual history serves as a "sounding board" for the ideas that have been debased in Germany's present situation. But there is no automatism of history: Germany's spiritual and intellectual traditions did not "have" to lead to National Socialism.[112]

Plessner views what has happened in Germany as part of a larger crisis of Western civilization. As we saw in *Power and Human Nature*, according to Plessner, it was Christianity and ancient philosophy that taught the equality of all human beings, based on

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[110] Hellmuth Plessner, *Das Schicksal deutschen Geistes im Ausgang seiner bürgerlichen Epoche*, Zürich: Max Niehans Verlag, 1935. Republished in 1959 as *Die Verspätete Nation. Über die politische Verführbarkeit bürgerlichen Geistes*, Zürich: Niehans Verlag, 1959. Now in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. VI, 7-335.

[111] "Die Aufgabe der Philosophischen Anthropologie", *Philosophia* 2, Beograd (1937), 95-111. Reprinted in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. VIII, 33-52.

[112] Compare the review of the second edition in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 191 (1960), 637 et. seq.

their being united in a superhuman reason. Plessner calls this doctrine "humanism" and sees it as the spiritual source of the science and technology that has changed civilization throughout the world. But now in Asia, in Europe – in Spain, Italy, Germany, and the Soviet Union – , the civilizational elements have been separated from the humanist ethos. Europe has lost faith in itself and its claim to leadership now rests solely on its ability to "do things better". The question of civilization has been reduced to the question of power.[113]

The deepest level of the crisis is found in the loss of authority on the part of religion, metaphysics, and history. Modern historical and social science can destroy the positions "to which the human being flees ("flüchten") in order to slake his thirst for eternity", but they cannot build. These sciences have demonstrated the relativity of all norms and, in so doing, destroyed faith in the idea of an overriding reason that binds all people into one humanity. It is only the scholars themselves who cling to the unity of reason, claiming that all relativity is relative to something. But this sort of methodological postulate gives no new impulses to faith.[114] Due to the general loss of authority and faith – aggravated in Germany by defeat in World War I and the Treaty of Versailles – the German finds no authority outside the state itself.

The 19th century's search for a timeless moral law or value that would anchor human existence revealed that the "history of the soul made ill by the consciousness of sin had not yet come to an end".[115] The atheists still believed in their atheism, the skeptics retained faith in reason but changed the object away from God toward Nothing.[116] This type of speculation was overcome by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Marx who were in agreement that, in the wake of the decline of Christianity, spirituality had become mere dishonest ideology.

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[113] *The Fate*, 40.

[114] Ibid., 162.

[115] Ibid., 194.

[116] To distinguish between Plessner's use of the word "nothing" in his philosophical anthropology, i.e. man standing on "nothing", a view which he claims comes after the traditional symbols of philosophy have been "neutralized" (see below), and are therefore no longer valid, in what follows I will capitalize "Nothing" and "Being" when referring to the traditional symbols, and write the terms in lower case letters when referring to Plessner's "neutralized" concepts.

According to Plessner there is no going back behind these three thinkers. Especially Nietzsche recognized the nihilism of the age and insisted that it had to be lived through in order to gain a new prospect on man. Once one had overcome false notions of "transcendence" one would discover that "this world", without a "beyond", is no longer a mere "this world", but the field of human creativity.[117]

Thus, according to Plessner, when one looks at 20th century critical philosophy, whether oriented to Kant or Brentano, to human science or natural science, to scientific objectivity or value subjectivity, the path it has to follow has been clearly laid out. All philosophy (i.e. Heidegger, Jaspers, Hartmann) bears signs of the disappointment caused by the consciousness of living in the disenchanted world. To underline this principle statement Plessner quotes "Politics as a Vocation". In the relationship of philosophy to the conduct of life "all agree with Max Weber's stoic position":

> " '[A]s long as life remains immanent and is interpreted in its own terms, it knows only of an unceasing struggle of these gods with one another. Or speaking directly, the ultimate *possible* attitudes toward life are irreconcilable, and hence their struggle can never be brought to a final conclusion. Thus it is necessary to make a *decision*' .
> 'Fate, and certainly not 'science', holds sway over these gods and their struggles' ".[118]

With these quotations Plessner reaffirms Weber's position of viewing man from the "mundane standpoint", a position Plessner had maintained since at least 1924. In his own words he summarizes his systematization of Weber:

> "The fact that today scientific philosophy must surrender its office of being a guide to life confronts man's sense of responsibility with two ultimate alternatives. Either he can affirm his historical finiteness or he can deny it in principle. Either philosophy takes from its own neutralization the positive meaning that through the complete disappearance of limits to life's horizon man has been thrown back on himself, i.e., that he is condemned to be free (Freiseinmuss), or man turns his back on this freedom and breaks with the tradition's entire history".[119]

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[117] *The Fate*, 206.

[118] Ibid., 206-207. The quoted passages: Weber, "Politics as a Vocation", 152 and 148.

[119] Plessner, *Gesammelte Schriften* Vol. VI, 207.

When one affirms one's "finiteness", one stands on "nothing", not the Nothing that skeptics substituted for Being, but the "nothing" that "remains" when the entire question of Being or Nothingness has been "neutralized". At the same time this situation opens up the endless prospect of man's freedom and he can select anything out of his cultural history and consciously affirm it as his own. But, as Plessner said in *The Levels of Organic Being*, there is no going back to the gods: By which he meant, there is no going back behind Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Marx – and Weber.

Not every one who feels the destruction of the tradition has the courage to stand on "nothing" and take personal responsibility for rescuing what Plessner calls "humanism"– the quintessence of what philosophy and Christianity taught of man. Instead some react by asserting that the tradition never had validity and return to a position prior to all civilization: The faith in "blood" replaces religious faith.[120]

In his inaugural lecture Plessner takes up the same subject with greater urgency. Germany and Europe have been deserted by God, and humanity is threatened with a descent into bestiality. In this critical situation the question of man's nature, his essence and purpose, must be formulated anew.[121] In view of the fact that, so Plessner, we have no evidence that there is a cosmos there is no point in trying to understand man as a "micro-cosmos".

Under the conditions of the "neutralized" tradition man must take responsibility for his own self-image. But philosophical anthropology cannot say what man "should be".[122] It is a structural formula that investigates the potential that lies in man's unfathomable-ness, out of which both the power to create and the power to destroy emerge. In talking of man philosophical anthropology recognizes no other constant; therefore, when Plessner speaks of the human being, he eschews such terms as "substance" or "human nature". Plessner's focus is on the "process" of "power" (Können).

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[120] Ibid., 208-209.

[121] Plessner, "The Task of Philosophical Anthropology", 35

[122] Ibid., 39.

The task today is to bring sobriety back into a world that is being destroyed by politicians, economists, and medical doctors who dream of breeding a new race. The power of the human being has to be brought back into bounds before man destroys himself.[123]

Plessner hopes that by facing the abyss that opens up under man's feet when he acknowledges that he stands on "nothing", man will undergo a *conversio* (Umkehr), and, as a result, make a "decision for humanity". Following this "catharsis", and in close co-operation with the social and natural sciences, philosophical anthropology will explore the possibilities for humanity that man can realize, if he chooses to.[124]

Following the events of 1933 Plessner has no new arguments. But the state of the problems has deteriorated well beyond the situation of 1924 and 1931. Pedagogical persuasion has failed. Once Plessner argued that Europe had to cut itself loose from its traditional faith in absolutes in order to "triumph", now he pleads in the interest of bare survival.

There is of course no guarantee that the a radical procedure of looking into the abyss will produce the radical conversion Plessner hopes for. In 1935 Plessner criticized academics who avoided relativism with the argument that one cannot talk about things being relative without assuming that they are relative to something. Plessner pointed out that this type of conserving of the idea of truth did not strengthen faith in general. Indeed, in 1931 Plessner warned that the doctrine of man standing on "nothing" might erode the people's faith. With the triumph of National Socialism a form of faith alien to Plessner's intentions succeeded in getting control of the means of communication and preventing other views from being heard. Thus, even assuming that the "conversion" Plessner hopes for would place in a few individuals in Germany, it would still not be possible for them to bring their insights before the public.

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[123] Ibid., 50-51.

[124] Ibid., 46.

2. Eric Voegelin

Voegelin's writings after the triumph of National Socialism in Germany continue to deepen the idea of the religious roots of community that he developed with reference to the work of Spann, Schelling, and George in his books on race, and in earlier writings with reference to Augustine and Plato. In 1938, in *The Political Religions*, Voegelin examined the nature of intra-mundane religiosity[125]. Following the dissolution of the medieval empire through the emergence of national states, "religion" came to refer to the institution of the church, and "politics" to the state. The knowledge that religious experience permeates the political world was lost: a loss clearly revealed in the unfounded assertion of the state's "sovereignty". For there are many states and they do not constitute [as Weber and Plessner incorrectly assume –W.P.] ultimate spiritual orientations.

The human being experiences existence as "creaturely", and therefore "questionable" (fragwürdig). For one person the portals of his soul are open wide to take in the entire range of being from the inorganic to the divine. A maximal reception of reality combines with a maximal rationality in the ordering of experience into an idea of God, such as that developed in the *analogia entis*.[126] Another

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[125] Erich Voegelin, *Die Politischen Religionen*, Vienna: Bermann-Fischer, !938. Translated as The Political Religions in: *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol. 5., *Modernity Without Restraint*, edited by Manfred Henningsen, 2000, 19-75.

Against the interpretations that read *The Political Religions* as a pamphlet against National Socialism, and for a discussion of its place in the development of Voegelin's theory of politics, vide Peter J. Opitz, "Eric Voegelins *Politische Religionen*. Kontexte und Kontinuitäten", *Occasional Papers*, XLVII, Eric-Voegelin-Archiv: Munich, 2005.

[126] In the works of Voegelin that we have examined in this essay this is the third time that we encounter the distinction between the originary given spiritual experience and the rationalization of such experience for application by analogy to phenomena within the space-time-continuum. In *The Theory of Government* we read: „In our view a theory of human existence, if it is to be good, considers the movements of thought in which existence, in its constitution, can originarily be given to itself and explains the same continuous structure of existence for life's entire course. Only the first part of the theory yields real knowledge by pointing the way to an evident giving of the self to the self (*Selbstgebung*) in concrete existence; not however in the form in which objects are given to us in experience, but

person enjoys only limited glimpses of reality, perhaps only one: nature, a great man, his *Volk*, or humanity. What he sees becomes, for him, the *ens realissimum*. It takes the place of God and obscures his view of everything else, most importantly his view of God.

National Socialism is an inner-worldly religion that sets the *ens realissimum* of race or *Volk* in the place of divine transcendence. With the loss of the personal relationship to the divine ground the individual becomes a mere means. But Voegelin's criticism is not merely directed against National Socialism. Doctrines, like Plessner's, whose *ens realissimum* is humanism, are also the object of his critique: All doctrines that view man as a intra-mundane creature obscure the nature of reality. "The language of politics is always interspersed with the ecstasies of religiosity and, thus, becomes a symbol in the precise sense of letting experiences concerned with the contents of the world be permeated with elements of the transcendent divine".[127] Thus, the "secularization of life that accompanied the doctrine of humanitarianism is the soil in which such anti-Christian religious movements as National Socialism were able to prosper". Such inner-worldly religiosity can only be overcome in religious renewal, either within the traditional churches or outside them.[128] By religious renewal Voegelin does not mean a new doctrine or dogma, but, as we saw in *The Theory of Governance*, the return to the experiences of transcendence, such as the Christian *conversio* or the Platonic *periagoge*.

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in existence illuminating and manifesting itself to itself (*existenz-verdeutlichendes Darleben der Existenz*). Generally the second part consists in the more or less successful attempt to rationally present the temporal course of existence as a continuum, i.e., as the life revealed in the existential self-giving. In principle these attempts are doomed to failure because they treat human existence as an object, like a thing that we can perceive. In reality human existence cannot be grasped in an objectifying mode of thought, but only in the existential movement of thought in which it becomes present to itself" (286-287). In *Race and State* we find the difference between „primal images" and „thought images". (24-25).

The distinction between experiences that transcend the world of time and space and the rationalizations of such experience is found in Voegelin's earliest texts. Compare Voegelin's discussion of Henri Bergson in his dissertation, "Interaction and Spiritual Community", in: *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol. 32, 64-67.

[127] Voegelin, *The Political Religions*, 70.

[128] Ibid., 24.

The Platonic *periagoge* is at the center of Voegelin's 1944 article "Nietzsche, the Crisis and the War".[129] Voegelin rejects the notion that responsibility for the war is Germany's alone, recognizing that the Second World War is but one more expression of the general crisis of Western spirituality.

In the 19th century Nietzsche prophesied that, if there were not spiritual renewal in the West, one could expect the outbreak of wars in which the struggles of the spirit took on political forms. In his effort to get beyond the crisis Nietzsche adopted what Voegelin calls the "platonic attitude" in politics: the attempt to descend into the depths of one's soul to find spiritual resources that have not been eroded by the general intellectual corruption.

Thus, like Plessner in the mid thirties, Voegelin's 1944 analysis of the contemporary political disorder focuses on Nietzsche. But there are important differences. For Plessner Nietzsche is the central figure in modern thought, behind which one cannot return. For Voegelin Nietzsche is far from the central figure in modern thought; important as he is, he is "primarily a phenomenon in German intellectual history".[130] For Plessner the great achievement of Nietzsche was to see that the tradition that Christianity and classical philosophy had supported was dead. For Voegelin it is because Nietzsche was closed to the experiences that are at the center of this tradition that he cannot be the figure around which a new community of spiritual substance can gather. One can indeed go back beyond Nietzsche, to Christianity and to Plato. Voegelin points out that Nietzsche's "Platonism" was vitiated by the structure of his spiritual life; his soul was closed to transcendence. Nevertheless::

"The Platonic attitude of Nietzsche can be resumed if a new hope should awaken that the human substance is present that would make possible an overcoming of the crisis […] and if the soul of the man who makes the attempt would not be his prison. This man appeared in the person of Stefan George".[131]

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[129] Eric Voegelin, „Nietzsche, the Crisis, and the War", *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol. 10, 126-156.

[130] Ibid., 140.

[131] Ibid., 144.

In 1944 the figure Voegelin turns to in order to get beyond Nietzsche's intra-mundane perspective is Stefan George, the same person he turned to in 1930 to get beyond the presupposition of value free science, the “disenchanted world”. In 1944 Voegelin’s analysis of the "platonic attitude" – the details of which we will pass over here – takes up the theme of the *philia politike* which he first explored in his 1930 lecture on Weber, and the theme of the religious roots of community which he subsequently developed. The advent of National Socialism did not alter Voegelin's theoretical interests but offered one more instance of the intra-mundane religiosity that characterizes the Western crisis and confirmed anew his conviction that only in the orientation to transcendence can political order be established.

3. Summary

In the 1930’s Plessner and Voegelin were confronted with the fact of exile. An important aspect of both men’s writings in this period is the realization that there is no determinism in German culture or history that “had” to lead to National Socialism. They also agree that one makes a mistake when one interprets what is a general Occidental crisis as an exclusively “German problem”. In this respect Plessner’s and Voegelin’s writings in the 1930's and 40's are ahead of many present day views of the period. But there are also important differences between the two. Plessner’s thought remains tied to Germany. The problems he sees and the solutions he seeks are informed by the views of one school of German thought, the tradition of secularized German Protestantism which in Weber culminated in the notion of the "disenchanted world" and, consequently, the need to rescue human dignity in a world without a divine ground. One aspect of German intellectual life, the notion of a world without transcendence, is taken by Plessner to be representative of Germany as a whole and as the key to understanding universal humanity. Parallel to Plessner’s exclusive orientation to what he takes to be “German thought” (in reality one aspect of German intellectual life), is Plessner’s unbroken emotional tie to Germany, long after his enforced exile:

> "The Netherlands was considered the typical country of exile for those who did not want to be too far away from the old homeland (alte Heimat) and who tried in that way to avoid a final break with Germany".[132]

Plessner succeeded in acculturating himself in Holland without making a break with Germany. Until the occupation of the Netherlands by Germany in May 1940, he regularly spent the summer semester break with his mother in Wiesbaden. He still visited Germany as late as 1944, on one occasion traveling on a troop train to do so.[133]

In Germany, by 1933, the loss of transcendence had led, not to the embrace of Weber's agnosticism, itself an inner-worldly religion, but to the triumph of an inner-worldly religion of aggressive nationalism. Yet, as late as 1935, by which time the National Socialist regime had eliminated any possible internal opposition, we still find Plessner looking to Germany for solutions:

> "Plessner speaks of the task of the 'statesmen and philosophers' to make decisions concerning the 'new condition of society' as though the possibilities that were open in 1931-32 still existed. Although with the National Socialist accession to power the essential decisions had already been made, he once again explores the "image of German fate" ("das 'Schicksalsbild' der Deutschen") in terms of its various options and, in the face of recent historical events, argues for a more humane form of German-Being (Deutschseins)".[134]

From the beginning Voegelin did not try to build on the results of Weber's insights but inquired into the nature of Weber's faith. This led to a rapid expansion of the scope of his intellectual horizon beyond the bounds of German methodological debates and the limits

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[132] Carola Dietze, „Der eigenen Wissenschaft treu bleiben. Helmuth Plessner im niederländischen Exil". In: *Nationalsozialismus in den Kulturwissenschaften, Bd. 2. Leitbegriffe-Deutungsmuster-Paradigmenkämpfe. Erfahrungen und Transformationen im Exil*. Edited by Hartmut Lehmann and Otto Gerhard Oexle, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 417-451. Here 445-447.

[133] Ibid., 424-425. These facts should not to be misunderstood: Plessner had no sympathy for the regime in Berlin and during the war actively supported the Dutch resistance. Vide Monika Plessner, *Die Argonauten auf Long Island*, Berlin: Rowohlt, 1995,43-46.

[134] Schüßler, *Helmuth Plessner*, 142-143.

of *Geisteswissenschaft*. By 1930 he had found his way to the *philia politike* of Aristotle and the Eros of Plato. This deepening of his intellectual and spiritual orientation was augmented in 1930-1931 by investigations into Augustine and the nature of religious experience. In the 1930's we find Voegelin moving step by step to studies that encompass a universal concept of human nature. Before his exile this movement culminated in *The Political Religions*: "We have only presented examples from the Mediterranean and Western European cultural areas, but the thesis is universal and also applies to the political forms in the East". [135]

Where Plessner remained intellectually and emotionally tied to Germany, Voegelin reflected on the spiritual meaning of exile and advanced from the political fact of forced immigration to an understanding of the spiritual symbol of "exodus":

> "Augustine classifies the conflicts between the Chosen people and the empires under the symbol of exodus and understands the historical process of exodus, exile, and return as figurations of the tension within being between time and eternity. Whichever form the exodus may adopt – that of the real emigration from society or that of a collision within society between representatives of higher- and lower-ranking orders – the dynamism and direction of the process stem from the love for eternal being". [136]

In contrast to Plessner's "philosophical anthropology", based on Weber's "mundane perspective", Voegelin's studies are guided by the love for eternal being.[137] Plessner's position expresses one form of German national culture derived from secularized Protestantism; Voegelin's position is based on insight into the universal experience of transcendence. In Plessner's perspective Voegelin's orientation to transcendent being belongs to the world that Nietzsche overcame; in Voegelin's perspective Plessner's intra-mundane anthropology is part of the West's spiritual crisis. The differences between the two

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[135] Voegelin, *The Political Religions*, 70.

[136] Eric Voegelin, „Eternal Being in Time" in: *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol. 6, *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics*, edited with and Introduction by David Walsh, Columbia/London: University of Missouri Press, 2002, 312-341. Here 337.

[137] Compare, Ellis Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution: A Biographical Introduction*. With a new Preface and Epilogue by the author and a Foreword by Michael Henry, New Brunswick/London: Transaction Publishers, 2nd. Ed., 2000. Here, 218-229 and 253-279.

positions could hardly be greater. In my conclusion I will bring these differences into focus, taking as my starting point the categories developed in chapter one in connection with Weber's lectures on the vocations of science and politics.

Conclusion

At the end of the discussion of Max Weber's two lectures in the first chapter of this work I listed a number of topics which would concern Plessner and Voegelin in their attempts to "get beyond" the presuppositions of value free science. These attempts were not motivated by a quarrel with Weber's notion of empirical social science, but with Weber's assumption that rationality was confined to the – to use Scheler's terminology – "knowledge of domination". When I now return to these categories I will not follow the catalog in detail[138] but confine myself to an examination of the most important issues in terms of the transformations they have undergone in the work of Plessner and Voegelin.

The reader will recall that the topic of faith entered both of Weber's lectures at critical points. Indeed it could not be otherwise. When a person reflects on "vocations" he must face the question of who does the "calling". If he can no longer find the answer to this question in *God*, he must nevertheless recognize that it as at this level of reflection, i.e. the consideration of "ultimate things", that an answer must be sought. Thus in "Science as a Vocation" Weber introduces the concept of the *disenchanted world* as an ultimate orientation, finding in it the *ens realissimum*. Consequently man is not seen as *imago Dei*, but exclusively from the *mundane perspective*. In a passage in the *Politeia* where Plato deals with the symbolism of the gods he speaks of *typoi peri theologias*.[139] In this study we have

[138] The concepts were: Disenchantment, true Being, God and philosophy as illusions, facts and values, the criteria of selection, science as 'fate', nationalism, infinite progress and obsolescence, passion as distance, faith and purpose, ethics and politics, human dignity and the 'mundane perspective', religion, agnosticism, private life, politics as the struggle for power, the knowledge of domination, culture, and salvation, and metaphors and inversions.

The concepts mentioned in this conclusion will appear in *italics*.

[139] Plato, *The Republic*, 379a.

encountered three positions in regard to the symbolism of *God*: Weber's agnosticism, Plessner's atheism, and Voegelin's return to the experience of the divine. Weber tells his audience that there is no rational way to acquire knowledge of *true being* or *god*. He does not say that the order of the universe is an *illusion* but that science cannot demonstrate it. Further, he recognizes the right of each individual who, after exploring all avenues and finding no rational ground for a theoretical insight or a practical act, makes the statement that Luther made at the Diet of Worms: "I stand here and can do no other". Despite his own skepticism Weber recognizes the ultimate right of such a stand.[140]

This horizon gets lost in Plessner. First, he reifies the ethical maxims of politics into two sociological forms, assigning the "ethics of conviction" to community and the "ethics of responsibility" to society. Second, he assigns the relationship to transcendence to community. Third, he limits the relationship to transcendence to the corrupt form of trying to realize "heaven on earth". In his subsequent writings Plessner carries this rigid schematism into the nature of politics and into the nature of the human being. I have referred to this procedure as a "radicalization" of Weber's position. According to Plessner one either accepts the notion that the tradition has come to an end and looks for a new legitimation, for example in philosophical anthropology, or one denies that the tradition ever had validity and, as a surrogate for religious faith, returns to a position "before civilization", for example, to a "faith in blood".

As a result of Plessner's systematization of Weber's position we find that a number of the other categories we identified in Weber's writings also have a place in Plessner's. We have seen how Plessner transformed the *infinite progress* of science, in which all of its results are made obsolete by succeeding ones, into an anthropological constant. Out of "nothingness" man brings forth culture. As time passes he takes every cultural achievement back into the "nothingness" out of which it emerged.

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[140] I have described Weber's position in religious terms. Philosophically it can also be described as a particular ambivalent attitude toward – using Scheler's term -- "cultural knowledge". Weber acknowledges its principle importance but denies the possibility of a rational commitment to any one of its concrete expressions. Vide Christian Schwaabe, *Freiheit und Vernunft in der Unversöhnten Moderne*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2002. Here, 262-268.

In Weber science becomes man's *fate* if man is strong enough to face up to reality. If science could not tell man what he should do, it could nevertheless show him which actions ran contrary to the structure of reality, as this structure is revealed to him in empirical social science. In this way science provided man with *negative criteria* for making decisions: it was logical that actions which would bring one into collision with the structure of reality be censured. However Weber cannot say that such actions "should" be censored. This decision depends on the prudence of the acting persons, and practical wisdom does not come within the scope of Weber's science. Plessner's scientific position does not advance beyond this, and, in principally eliminating the relationship to transcendence, his philosophical anthropology falls behind it. Plessner claims that philosophical anthropology has become necessary because the tradition of classical philosophy and Christianity has been "neutralized". But, in contrast to this tradition, philosophical anthropology has no criteria for the "good". It examines all possibilities inherent to human nature, from humane conduct to bestiality, with no basis for pronouncing the desirability of the former over the latter. Plessner's last bulwark against inhumanity lies in the hope that when man looks into the abyss of his "nothingness" he will experience a conversion and make a "decision" for some aspect of humanism that once had its place in the now "neutralized" tradition.

What can be said for such a hope? In 1931 Voegelin commented that Plessner passed remarkably quickly from the notion of "life" to the notion of politics[141]. It seems to me that here, too, the transition from the man who stands on "nothing" to the man who has the conversion, is theoretically unjustified. Plessner's philosophical anthropology rejects all notion of "substance", as indeed it must when Plessner maintains that the terms Being and Nothingness are no longer valid. For Plessner man is the process which he sometimes calls "life", and sometimes, "power". But the man of the conversion is a concrete individual who lives in a cosmos of Being in which there is Something to convert to.

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[141] Plessner's "concept of 'life' is applied without qualification to existences of all types, personal and individual human existence as well as collective existence". Review of "Power and Human Nature", *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol. 13, 41.

The cathartic experience of looking into the abyss and undergoing a conversion has been described by Max Scheler. The first and direct self-evident philosophical insight that prepares one for such a conversion is present in the philosophical doubt that inaugurates the process. "Something" must be doubted. Put in the form of a proposition this insight states:

> "That *there is something* (in general) or, to put it more acutely, *there is not nothing* – the word 'nothing' here denoting not simply the not-being of anything or non-existence of a thing, but that absolute nothing whose negation of being does not 'as yet' discriminate in the negated being between thusness (*So-sein*), or essence, and existence (*Dasein*). The situation that *there is not nothing* is at one and the same time the object of the first and most direct self-evident insight and the object of the most intense, the ultimate philosophical *wonder* […].[142]

The moral upsurge that carries one to the experience of "conversion" begins in this wonder: The amazement that is found at the deepest point of doubt, that there is Being, and not Nothing. But Plessner has eliminated the context of Being. His man stands on his own "nothingness". At any level of inspection, from the most superficial to the deepest reflection, this person can only confront his own unfathomable "nothing". Plessner cannot have it both ways. The subject who stands "nowhere" cannot discover Being.

In rejecting Weber's idea of the *disenchanted world* Voegelin rejected the notion that one had to give up the forms of cultural and salvational knowledge. He had no need to think the tradition "neutralized", as Plessner did, he had no need to take Nietzsche's closed-ness to transcendence as a result behind which one could not return, and he therefore had no need to create a doctrine of human nature in which transcendence is ruled out.

The position Weber presented in "Science as a Vocation" and "Politics as a Vocation" summarized the results of broad studies of his own and other cultures. Plessner's systematization of Weber's position involved no research of his own.[143] All the more does the criticism that Voegelin later made of Weber apply to Plessner as

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[142] Max Scheler, *On The Eternal in Man*, 98.

[143] "Plessner's references to the decline of faith and religiousness in modern society are numerous. However, from Plessner the sociologist one would also like to see the empirical proof for this assertion". Hammer, "Glauben an den Menschen", 148.

well: Weber's extensive studies have a "significant omission", Pre-Reformation Christianity. Voegelin finds the reason for the omission in the fact that one cannot engage in a serious study of medieval Christianity without discovering among its 'values' the belief in a rational science of human order. If one wishes to show that the politics of Plato, Aristotle, or St. Thomas represent mere "value" positions, one must first demonstrate that their claim that they are engaged in science is unfounded. However such an attempt is self-defeating. By the time one has penetrated the meaning of metaphysics with sufficient knowledge to be able to criticize metaphysics one will have become a metaphysician oneself.[144]

Therefore the results of this study on the efficacy of philosophical anthropology, or religious experience, as ways to overcome the presuppositions of value free science, and to re-open the science of man to the *knowledge of philosophy* and the *knowledge of salvation*, are in agreement with Voegelin's statement in *Order and History*:

> "When the philosopher explores the spiritual order of the soul, he explores a realm of experiences which he can appropriately describe only in the language of symbols expressing the movement of the soul toward transcendental reality and the flooding of the soul by transcendence. At the border of transcendence the language of philosophical anthropology must become the language of religious symbolization".[145]

[144] Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1953. Here 20.

[145] Eric Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle. Order and History*, Vol. III. Baton Rouge/London: University of Louisiana Press, 1957. Here, 363.

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