

OCCASIONAL PAPERS

ERIC-VOEGELIN-ARCHIV
LUDWIG-MAXIMILIANS-UNIVERSITÄT
MÜNCHEN

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OCCASIONAL PAPERS, XV, März 2000

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The Philosophical Anthropology of Race: A Voegelinian Encounter,

OCCASIONAL PAPERS
hrsg. von Peter J. Opitz und Dietmar Herz
Eric-Voegelin-Archiv, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
Redaktion: Sebastian Brökelmann

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ISSN 1430-6786
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There is a tendency, which I have shared at times, to spiritualize Voegelin's politics. The two 1933 books on the European idea of race, however, bring us back to earth.¹ Or so it would seem. In them, we are reminded of the specifically physical dimensions of human existence as these affect political self-interpretation. We are also reminded of the dangers of severing the psychical and physical aspects of our being, or of misunderstanding their interrelationships. While several authors have called us to recover a balance of consciousness in the Voegelinian manner,² Voegelin seems here to call us to recover a balance of body symbols. Or, again, so it would seem. What does such a recovery entail? The present essay pursues this question. First, it briefly explores Voegelin's early concept of a "political idea." Second, it examines Voegelin's concept of "primal images" and certain problems surrounding it. Third, it reviews the problem of vision in a philosophical anthropology that includes a concept

¹ Eric Voegelin, *Rasse und Staat* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1933) [translation: *Race and State*, Ruth Hein, trans., Claus Vondung, ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998)]; Eric Voegelin, *Die Rassenidee in der Geistesgeschichte von Ray bis Carus* (Berlin: Junker und Dünhaupt Verlag, 1933) [translation: *The History of the Race Idea from Ray to Carus*, Ruth Hein, trans., Claus Vondung, ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998)].

² Glenn Hughes, *Mystery and Myth in the Philosophy of Eric Voegelin* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1993); Kevin Keulmann, *The Balance of Consciousness: Eric Voegelin's Political Theory* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990); Michael P. Morrissey, *Consciousness and Transcendence: The Theology of Eric Voegelin* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994); Ronald D. Srigley, *Eric Voegelin's Platonic Theology: Philosophy of Consciousness and Symbolization in a New Perspective* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991).

of primal images. As it then moves on to consider Voegelin's seemingly laudatory appraisal of Carl Gustav Carus' race theory, it considers what appears to be a kind of Weberian relativism lurking in Voegelin's work on race. Finally, I offer two concluding reflections: one on the missing element of analysis in the race books and its effect on Voegelin's evaluation of the European race idea, and a second one on the way in which Voegelin's appraisal of the race theory of Carus in 1933 seems to anticipate certain features of his own, mature philosophical anthropology.

I

In the late twentieth century, it may surprise the reader that Voegelin seems to imply that using the category of race is prima facie not an illegitimate source for a symbolization of political reality.³ More precisely:

A symbolic idea like the race idea is not a theory in the strict sense of the word. And it is beside the mark to criticize a symbol, or a set of dogmas, because they are not empirically verifiable. While such criticism is correct, it is without meaning, because it is not the function of an idea to describe social reality, but to assist in its constitution.⁴

Any constitution of the self in a community is based at least in part on political ideas. Political ideas are symbols that give meaning to the complex of human relations and activities that comprise a human community. They are a vision of the whole. Political ideas are not attempts to describe reality as it is; they

³ Voegelin repeats this assertion several times. See Eric Voegelin, "The Growth of the Race Idea," *The Review of Politics*, 2(1940), 283, 284, 286, 312; Voegelin, *Race Idea*, 12 [*Rassenidee*, 10].

⁴ Voegelin, "Growth," 284.

are symbols that “have the function of creating the image of a group as a unit.”⁵ Experiences of human existence and their interpretations, in both of which we all share, are the basis of political ideas. The images that they create are based on human experiences of the mind or the body including biological relatedness to others in birth, the universal experience of death, experiences of intentionality and freedom, and experiences of reason and transcendence. They may also originate in human experiences and interpretations of the external world; a comparison of Homer and Hobbes, for example, indicates that whether we live in a cosmos inhabited by gods or in a universe of matter in motion, empty of gods and mostly empty of living things, may affect how we conceive of ourselves and what kind of corresponding political order we believe there ought to be.

The meaning that a community ascribes to itself, therefore, is based on an interpretation of the individual in its manifold relations to other individuals, the individual’s experiences of the self, and in the manifold relations of the community as a whole to the various constituents of the rest of reality, however that reality is experienced and interpreted.⁶ The ascription of meaning that unites the community is mediated to it through various linguistic and non-linguistic activities and symbols that represent political ideas. The brethren, the body politic, and the community of autonomous individuals are all examples of self-ascriptive symbols that mediate to a community the meaning of its order and its place in the world.

⁵ “Growth,” 284. Political ideas receive extensive discussion and analysis in this essay and in *Race and State*.

⁶ Let us bracket the complex issues raised by Marxists, post-structuralists and others concerning the linguistic manufacture and reproduction of truth and its attendant problems.

Religious and secular ceremonies, systems of law, and myths of origin may also, alongside their practical purposes, perform the function of symbolic activities that represent political ideas that order a community. The political ideas these various symbolic media present to us have persuasive force precisely because they are rooted in our manifold experiences of our own human existence.

The cohesion of any such symbol that rests on human experience derives from two directions at once: from the experience of the individual as independent person, and from the experience of the individual in community.⁷ The “picture of social reality” that is drawn from these experiences may be “‘wrong’ in the epistemological sense,”⁸ but such a criticism misses the purpose of such symbols—they are not the theoretical elements of a science, but the rhetorical and symbolic elements of the self-interpretation and self-constitution of a political community.

The human body itself is a powerful source of political ideas. The experiences that all human beings have of their physical existence—death, power and powerlessness, being determined in one’s physical and mental faculties, being woven into a biological series of individuals—are a rich source of political ideas that give meaning and definition to the existence of a political community. From these and any other experiences of being a physical, animate being come a group of political ideas that we may call body-ideas. Body ideas are particularly important for understanding the ideas that give definition to a community, because “body experiences are basic human experiences and every symbol which can use them as a

⁷ Voegelin, *Race and State*, 4 [*Rasse und Staat*, 2].

⁸ Voegelin, “Growth,” 284.

material starting point can be sure of a strong emotional hold over its believers.”⁹ Race ideas are in turn a sub-category of body-ideas.

II

Voegelin’s account of political “ideas” or constituting symbols raises several problems, of which one is particularly glaring—if an epistemological criticism of the ordering symbols of a community is beside the point, are we not left with a fatal relativism, a liberal market-place of ideas of person and community? In Voegelin’s estimation in 1940, ideas vary in their “ethical and metaphysical values,” but these values are independent of the “correctness” of any particular idea as a picture of social reality. Indeed, Voegelin concludes that “whatever criticism can be launched rightly against the race symbolism under moral and religious aspects, as an interpretation of reality the idea that men are different, and that their differences may be due to differences in their biological structure, is not more unrealistic than the idea that all men are equal.”¹⁰

Second, this Weberian stance implies a kind of neutrality regarding race-ideas that invites further consideration in the aftermath of their full effect in mid-century Europe. What criteria, if any, did Voegelin allow for evaluating political ideas, including those employing the symbol of race? More particularly, what results from an attempt to attain “a new firm vision” of the modern ideas of man that underlie the race idea? Does this not result simply in the valorization of race thinking? The answer to this central query regarding

⁹ “Growth,” 316.

¹⁰ “Growth,” 312.

Voegelin's analysis of European race ideas falls into two parts.

First, a knowledge of Voegelin's later philosophical anthropology indicates that an evaluation of race-ideas with regard to their "ethical and metaphysical values" becomes the story of an absence, namely the absence of the classical experience of transcendent reason, along with the concomitant experiences (and their symbolizations) of "hope," "faith," "trust," and so forth. This absence does not yet receive the full light of a metaphysical analysis in Voegelin's analysis of the race idea, but his approbation of Carus' race idea strongly hints at the direction this analysis will eventually lead. Supplementing this not yet fully articulated absence, however, Voegelin seems to suggest in his discussion of Schelling that a strong presence of fear is an underlying constituent of race ideas in their cohesive role for community formation.¹¹ Second, if the "ethical and metaphysical value" of any given community idea is independent of its epistemological status with respect to the reality uncovered and analyzed, for example, by the natural sciences, what access do we have to a sound critique of such constituting symbols?

The simple sheer existence of political ideas does not remove them from systematic scrutiny. Political ideas emerge from basic human experience from which, in turn, are produced the primal images of human life that serve as the basis of all further interpretation of human existence. Primal images, Voegelin argues, arise "through their embodiment of persons, and we see other persons willingly accept them and recognize them as exemplary ways of living out a human existence."¹² These primal images can become the formative imaging forces

¹¹ Voegelin, *Race and State*, 151-153 [*Rasse und Staat*, 151-154].

¹² Voegelin, *Race Idea*, 17 [*Rassenidee*, 15].

in a particular group or even a civilization, and they therefore serve as the basis of the various political ideas that shape a particular society:

Throughout history human society has been structured according to the effects radiating from the images of all ranks and ultimately from the great primal images; it has been structured according to the rising and falling of these images and according to the degrees of authenticity and inauthenticity with which people followed them ... and quantitatively according to the groups and masses these images take hold of. The connections between images and their function in establishing, forming, and structuring society are the basis the ultimately gives legitimacy to the philosophizing about man.¹³

Voegelin's central argument in *History of the Race Idea* was that the primal image of man had been gradually transformed during the period of the Enlightenment from the primal image of the Christian person to a new post-Christian primal image of the internalized, demonic person.¹⁴ The transition from the Christian to the new image is quickly stated, but the tracing of its genealogy is complex. In the Christian image, man is raised "out of nature:"

though it presents him as a creature among other creatures, as a finite being among others, it nevertheless juxtaposes him to the rest of nature; he stands between God and the subhuman world. This intermediate status is not determined by a unique formative law that would constitute man as a self-contained existence, but by his participation in both the higher and the lower world.¹⁵

In the post-Christian image, however, we see a "new image of a substance that carries its species within itself as its structural law." Thus, when the "image of life as internalized emerged,

¹³ *Race Idea*, 17 [*Rassenidee*, 15].

¹⁴ *Race Idea*, 3 [*Rassenidee*, 1].

¹⁵ *Race Idea*, 4 [*Rassenidee*, 2].

the Christian image of man as an immortal being chained to the sensory realm changed into the image of a unified figure living out its meaning in this earthly existence.”¹⁶ Man is now firmly embedded, as it were, “in nature.” Voegelin traces out these two stages—first the appearance of the “phenomenon of life as a primary phenomenon,” and then the “internalization of the person” as the Christian image of the transcendent soul fades away—in the details of *The History of the Race Idea*. The phenomenon of life as primary leads to an “image of man as an earthly, self-contained, unified figure.”¹⁷ This image is embodied for its proponents in such great men of modernity as Frederick the Great, Goethe, Napoleon, Mozart, and Byron.¹⁸ Voegelin traces its genealogical development from the point at which “the ideas of the immortal soul and infinite progress in the development of reason had to be subverted until the new, finite image of man as a productive unity of body and mind with a meaningful earthly existence emerged.”¹⁹ The race idea is an epiphenomenon of this larger idea.²⁰

The tracing of this change in the primal way of seeing the phenomenon of life could not be pursued at the level merely of “philosophical propositions:” to offer a comprehensive history of an idea requires that one extend the analysis “to the historical substance itself, to the lines of force in the connections among primal images.” Thus, while “there is no *one* primal way of seeing and no *one* primal image of man maintained throughout history as the eternal norm of a perfect existence,” Voegelin could argue that two intellectual

¹⁶ *Race Idea*, 9 [*Rassenidee*, 7].

¹⁷ *Race Idea*, 8 [*Rassenidee*, 6].

¹⁸ *Race Idea*, 9-10 [*Rassenidee*, 7-8].

¹⁹ *Race Idea*, 16 [*Rassenidee*, 14].

²⁰ *Race Idea*, 3 [*Rassenidee*, 1].

engagements with primal ways of seeing were nevertheless possible.²¹

First, while the philosopher, sociologist, political scientist, anthropologist, or natural scientist “cannot fathom the ultimate reason for the appearance of a particular [primal] image,” he or she can nevertheless “understand the necessary conditions accompanying the first view and appearance of a new image and then trace the law of the course of its existence from its beginning to its decline and disappearance.” Second, having traced this genealogy, the scholar can also restore a decaying or decayed way of seeing. Hence, Voegelin’s opening paragraph:

The knowledge of man is out of joint. Current race theory is characterized by uncertainty about what is essential and a decline in the technical ability to grasp it cognitively. We turn to the history of a great idea to trace the law of its creation in happier moments of the world-spirit and to return from this immersion in its mature forms with a new firm vision and with hands now more skilled to reproduce what we have seen.²²

“Race,” to repeat, is not a “primal way of seeing.” Rather, a particular image of human being that supports race-thinking is. Voegelin’s enterprise in these race-books is therefore not an attempt to defeat the primal vision of man that results in racialist political symbols, but to explore its genealogy and, it would seem, to reinvigorate its principles by raising them to a niveau rapidly abandoned by the race theorists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The racialist way of seeing depended in its mid-twentieth-century German form upon a variety of scientific discourses for its legitimacy. Since

²¹ *Race Idea*, 17, 3 [*Rassenidee*, 5, 1].

²² *Race Idea*, 3 [*Rassenidee*, 1].

it is a way of seeing, however, it includes not merely a natural-scientific account of physical human phenomena, but also an account of psychical and spiritual human phenomena. That is to say, racist views of man are based on a primal way of seeing the relationship between what we might call the physical and the psychical/spiritual phenomena that together make up the unified phenomenon we call a living human being.

III

Race is a way of seeing that is based on a deeper primal way of seeing. "Ways of seeing" depend upon the faculty of vision. The question of a "way of seeing," thereby folds back into a philosophical anthropology. To survive, all living things, including human beings, must distinguish the features of their environment. Hostile and friendly, useful and harmful must all be distinguished from one another in order for the organism to maintain itself in an at best neutral, but more likely hostile environment. The environment, however, is not simply "given" to the imaging being: it must be conceptually ordered and interpreted. Physiological characteristics are one means human beings use to distinguish friend from foe, "us" from "them." Race is one way of characterizing and categorizing such physiological differences, and these can manifest themselves politically in the form of racist political ideas. We will consider first the matter of vision, and then the "way of seeing" as a factor in the character of political ideas and more specifically, in race-thinking. Such a discussion will serve to indicate both the plausible and the implausible aspects of seeing racially. Then we will turn to that "way of seeing" racially the Voegelin found most amenable. His amicable

evaluation of this specific case—the race theory of Carl Gustav Carus—raises difficulties that will lead us to a concluding evaluation of race-thinking.

A living being, we said, may be seen as a psychophysical unity, a bounded material mass governed by a principle of vitality. The initial characteristic, therefore, that distinguishes that which is animate from that which is not is the transcendence of the form of the animate over its matter. To be animate is to be engaged continuously in the maintenance of a specific form through a process of intake and expulsion of material across a boundary between that which is interior to the animate being and that which is external to it. The distinction between the external environment and the “internal” organism, separated by the boundary that defines the spatial limits of the organism, is fluid. Matter is readily transferred from one to the other; the contents of the organic form are temporary, but it is by means of these temporary contents, passing through the “spatial system” of the living form that the living form sustains itself. This process of exchanging matter across the spacial boundaries of the living form, and the transformation of matter “inside” that form is the essence of life: “The exchange of matter with the environment is not a peripheral activity engaged in by a persistent core: it is the total mode of continuity (self-continuation) of the subject of life itself.”²³

The process of metabolism entails a concept of freedom. Demonstrated in the animate activities of metabolism, organic freedom is contrasted with inorganic nonfreedom. It is not a freedom of the will, nor of the mind, yet such connotations

²³ Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 76.

remain, because these latter freedoms are extensions of organic freedom. Freedom at the basic organic level denotes “an objectively discernible mode of being, i.e., a manner of executing existence, distinctive of the organic *per se* and thus shared by all members but by no non-members of the class.” It is an “ontologically descriptive term which can apply to mere physical evidence at first.” To say that living beings are free is also to say that they carry “the burden of need,” and that they are “precarious beings.” Freedom is a paradoxical privilege, because “living substance, by some original act of segregation, has taken itself out of the general integration of things in the physical context, set itself over against the world, and introduced the tension of ‘to be or not to be’ into the neutral assuredness of existence.” This act of segregation, according to Jonas, is accomplished by “assuming a position of hazardous independence from the very matter which is yet indispensable to [life’s] being.” Although living things are “part of the common world,” their identity is divorced “from that of [their] contemporary stuff.”²⁴ On this account, the processes of metabolism are the first and primary phenomenological distinction between animate and inanimate. They cannot, moreover, be reduced to the chemical and physical relations of inanimate matter; they are ontically distinct.

The freedom of metabolism is constrained by two factors: the material needs for sustaining life and the concomitant possibility that life will cease. It may often be the case that there is insufficient material available for all organisms present in a given environment to sustain themselves. Conditions of plenitude or scarcity may affect the behavior of

²⁴ *Phenomenon*, 3-4.

the organism in various ways as it seeks to sustain itself by obtaining the materials necessary for maintaining its metabolic processes, which define it as a living being. An inability to obtain the materials required for continuing the metabolic functions that comprise life leads to their cessation, namely death. Death is a limit for any organism, a boundary to action, a constant threat that is overcome in each moment of metabolic continuity. It is the condition in which the processes of metabolism are no longer present, nor potentially present (such as under conditions of dormancy, in which appropriate environmental conditions permit that metabolic processes to resume). Death is thereby intimately linked to the tenuous freedom of the organic.

The freedom of metabolism is dependent on the ability of the organism to distinguish between numerous categories of inanimate and animate material. Metabolism is a complex process of specifics: to sustain itself, a living organism must acquire particular kinds of material in specific forms from a heterogeneous environment. A coherent philosophical biology recognizes the need for such a faculty of discerning mediacy and uncovers the philosophical consequences of its actual presence. Thus, human beings may be distinguished from other living things on the basis of the complexity or relative freedom of those faculties of mediacy they alone possess.²⁵ The most important of these for the problem of understanding the nature of political body-symbols turns out to be the faculty of vision. As we pass through an analysis of this faculty, we are returned to the problem of making ethical and metaphysical judgments, which forms the core problem of the present study.

²⁵ *Phenomenon*, 3-4.

Descartes distinguished man from the remainder of animate existing things by virtue of his “soul,” the res cogitans that was unique to man. Nietzsche argued similarly that the distinguishing feature of man as animate being is his intellect. Its purpose is to preserve the individual, nothing more. By its means, man, the “clever animal,” has “invented knowledge.”²⁶ Nietzsche is more helpful here than Descartes. To have knowledge, according to Nietzsche, is to discern images; accordingly, the chief product of the intellect is images. The fundamental characteristic of the animal, man, that distinguishes it from all others, therefore, is that he is an image-maker. Knowledge in the form of images is “the means by which the weaker, less robust individuals preserve themselves, since they are denied the chance of waging the struggle for existence with horns or the fangs of beasts of prey.”²⁷

Imaging is a process of mental abstraction in which the form of a given thing is abstracted from its matter. This mental separation of form from matter, however, is incomplete: an image need only be a partial representation of form, not an exact replication of it. The image-maker and image-observer must, therefore, be endowed with the ability not only mentally to separate form from matter, but also to separate the essence of form from its incidentals; an image, representative of what is essential to the form of a perceived object, thereby recognizably represents to its recipients the intended object, without the recipients requiring a complete re-iteration of the form to make the intention of the image (to represent a specific

²⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense,” translated by Walter Kaufmann, in Walter Kaufmann, ed., *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking Press, 1954), 43, 42.

²⁷ “On Truth and Lie,” 43.

object) intelligible to them.

One may think of imaging in modern philosophical-anthropological terms as a form of “mediacy in the relation of organism to environment.” Through the process of abstracting form from substance and representing that form to oneself and others, the organism that is able to do so mediates its environment (including other organisms) to itself. Imaging, in other words, is a complex form of metabolism:

Metabolism itself, and therefore plant life already, is mediated identity and continuity. On the animal level, representing a decisive step beyond the relative immediacy of vegetative existence, mediacy has the three aspects of motility, perception, emotion. All three imply distance: across it, and through the modes of perceiving, striving, acting, “world” is constituted and replaces the mere environment of the plant. “World” confronts the subject with discrete, self-contained objects, whereas the plant-environment consists of adjacent matter and impinging forces. Direct chemical commerce with the environment is the vegetative mode of outwardness, and it remains the basis for all organic existence. But in animal life this vegetative level is served deviously through the organism’s relations to objects out in space which are perceived, desired, reached, and acted upon externally before entering into the organic commerce of the metabolizing system. Thus the freedom of the animal level is that of external adjustments made in actions distinct from the end to be achieved and therefore coming under the alternative of correct/incorrect, of success and failure.²⁸

Human vision, however, is more than a matter of “adjustment,” or establishing “correct-incorrect.” Vision, perhaps more than any other form of mediacy, displays the bounded indeterminacy of human life. We are determined to be indeterminate:—what we “see” and what that which we see

²⁸ Jonas, *Phenomenon*, 183-4.

means for us is open to multiple interpretations, multiple determinations:

In the image-faculty of man a further degree of mediacy is reached, and the distance between organism and environment widened by a further step. This new degree lies in the ideative extension of perception . . . The new mediacy consists in the interposition of the abstracted and mentally manipulable eidos between sense and actual object, just as on the level of animal mediacy the perception of objects was interposed between the organism and its primary environment-relation. Imaging and speaking man ceases to see things directly: he sees them through the screen of representations of which he has become possessed by his own previous dealings with objects, and which are evoked by the present perceptual content, impregnating it with the symbolic charge, and added to by the new experience itself.²⁹

Human vision is most particularly a manifestation of human freedom. Vision, or more particularly, what we see, is less closely bound by the specific features of the sensible environment and our metabolic needs than any other mode of sensory perception. Human upright posture moves the eyes upward from their alignment with the snout or beak, so that they

now can be turned directly in a piercing, open look toward distant things and rest fully upon them, viewing them with the detached interest of wondering. . . . Eyes that lead jaws and fangs to prey are always charmed and spellbound by nearness. To eyes looking straight forward to the gaze of upright posture--things reveal themselves in their own nature. Sight penetrates depth; sight becomes insight.³⁰

No longer immediately affixed to the necessity of feeding or

²⁹ *Phenomenon*, 184-5.

³⁰ Erwin Straus, "The Upright Posture," in Erwin Straus, *Phenomenological Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 162.

self-protection, human eyes are freed for a wider horizon:

Man in upright posture, his feet on the ground and his head uplifted, does not move in the line of his digestive axis; he moves in the direction of his vision. He is surrounded by a world panorama, by a space divided into world regions joined together in the totality of the universe. Around him, the horizons retreat in an ever growing radius. Galaxy and diluvium, the infinite and the eternal, enter into the orbit of human interests.³¹

The freedom of the wider horizon makes human vision less determinate than any other sense. Vision is transformed from an immediate perception of what is into a “way of seeing.” We are then returned to the problem of relativism. If race is a “way of seeing,” if a way of seeing is, in fact, tied to activities of animate mediation, and if, at the same time, a scientific study of racialism is not an ethical evaluation of such thinking, is there a basis on which judgment about the quality of an idea is possible? Let us recall the problem of vision from a second perspective.

A living being, to use a Kantian idiom, is not a “thing-in-itself:” it is not a self-interpreting phenomenon, but an empirical appearance, whose nature may be interpreted in at least two categorically distinct ways.³² First, a living being

³¹ “Upright Posture,” 162.

³² “If at this point we hide the reality of concept formation under the false theory that the concept of a living being or organic form is an empirical concept, faithfully designating some conditions or traits that can easily be looked at in isolation, then we ruin from the outset our chances of understanding the laws of theory formation of this sphere in its higher-level forms. The concept of the individual is therefore justifiably formed; it is based on the understanding of the living form as a primal phenomenon: the living being placed in an environment, the subject in its medium, is an undeniable reality.” (Voegelin, *Race and State*, 42 [*Rasse und Staat*, 42]).

may be perceived as a psychophysical unity. Seen in this way, it is a bounded, material mass, informed by a principle of vitality, which we may variously call an animus or soul or psyche. The material of the living being is ordered in such a way that it appears not to be explicable simply in terms of the random behavior of matter, but to be governed by this supra-material vital principle. In modern discourse, such a conception of life is typically referred to as vitalism, but such a construction predates modernity by millennia.

Mechanism, a conception of life that denies vitalism, is the claim that all biological phenomena can, on the contrary, be described as epiphenomena of the more general phenomenon of matter in motion. Mechanism emerges as a conception of life with the flourishing of Enlightenment science, which introduces entirely new ways of seeing the phenomenon of life. Mechanism and vitalism in their various stripes are the two contemporary, alternative guiding images of life by which a philosophical biology and philosophical anthropology may steer. Their speculative content at the level of a general philosophical biology is recapitulated in a philosophical anthropology.

Mechanism and a radically dualistic vitalism are equally incapable, however, of giving a full exposition of a philosophical anthropology. Neither can indicate how the realm each respectively postulates as subordinate derives from the realm it postulates as absolute.³³ The sphere of the mind or

³³ See Helmut Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1975), 5. For the various issues involved in the debate, see Hilde Heine, "The Endurance of the Mechanism--Vitalism Controversy," (*Journal of the History of Biology*, 1 (Spring, 1972) V, 159-188; and Hilde Heine, "Mechanism

animus and the sphere of the body are ontically separate, epistemologically accessible by different means and methods at the same time that they are united in the psychophysical unity that is man. To make the one derivative of the other is to lose sight of the one for the sake of absolutizing the other. "The fact of life, as the psychophysical unity which the organism exhibits," renders illusory the radical separations between the animate principle, the mind, and the material body, but also the equation of all three into one, or the reduction of any two into one with the accompanying radical separation of the third. "The actual coincidence of inwardness and outwardness in the body compels the two ways of knowledge to define the relation otherwise than by separate subjects," but neither can they be reduced to one topic. Thus, Descartes' materialism and his principle of the res cogitans unique to man, for example, is untenable for a philosophy of life that accepts "the irrepressible voice of our psychophysical experience, every one of whose acts eloquently contradicts the dualistic division."³⁴ The basis for a critique of any and all speculative constructions of human existence, must, therefore, be our experience of ourselves as a psychophysical unity consisting of several parts. We do not experience ourselves as a composite or accretion of parts or faculties, but as a whole that is only analytically divisible. Even though the "parts" of man—experienced in the whole—are ontically distinct, they are nevertheless integrated into a whole.³⁵

and Vitalism as Meta-Theoretical Commitments," *The Philosophical Forum* 2 (Winter, 1968) I, 185-205. Cf. Robert Olby, "Schroedinger's Problem: What is Life?" *Journal of the History of Biology*, 4 (Spring, 1971) 1, 119-148.

³⁴ Jonas, *Phenomenon*, 18, 61.

³⁵ Cf. Voegelin, *Race and State*, 102-103, 107-108 [*Rasse und Staat*, 104-105, 109-110].

In this way, philosophical anthropology serves the role of a kind of “regulative critique” with respect to race symbols (and for all other political symbols based on experiences of the body) and their implicit claims to be grounded in empirical reality. Philosophical anthropology is the systematic and critical exploration of the basis for a given set of body-symbols. The role of philosophical anthropology cannot be to offer determinate “proofs” of the correctness of a given body-symbol, but only to ascertain and test the rigor in logic, conceptual coherence, and terminological consistency of the experiential claims that underlie such symbols. It is a critical reflection on the symbols being used.³⁶

Philosophical anthropology is an enterprise in which we bring to our attention the various experiences and dimensions of our existence, without proffering spurious solutions to the puzzles that the unity of these ontically distinct classes of experience (body, mind, vital principle and their manifold, ontically separable manifestations) present. All accounts that claim to offer solutions or explanations for the experienced unity of what is equally experienced as ontically distinct ultimately fail, because the ontic nature of the relationship of the ontic classes to one another is not the object of any possible experience.³⁷ Only the fact of these relations is experienced. All solutions or explanations (like that of Descartes) found in the sciences or in philosophy are ultimately speculative

³⁶ For a parallel description of theology, from which my description is taken, see Nicholas Lash, “Ideology, Metaphor and Analogy,” in Brian Hebblethwaite and Stewart Sutherland (eds.), *The Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology: Essays presented to D. M. MacKinnon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 68-95.

³⁷ See “Ideology, Metaphor and Analogy,” 66, 89, 105.

constructions the advocacy of which quickly descends to dogmatic assertion. Those forms of racism that refer for their authority to some kind of “scientific” account of man generally fall into this category.

The contents of a such solutions and explanations are not the object of experience, nor can such ontic content, apart from the facticity of the experience itself, properly be inferred from experience; they are speculative constructions that in dogmatic conflicts become reified into claims of fact, a status they cannot by their nature uphold. If the unity of human being in the midst of its componential nature cannot be explained, despite descriptions in minute detail of this unity, then it imparts to a philosophy of life and man a certain humility. Speech as theoretical conceptualization cannot penetrate and solve what experience does not make accessible to us. Human experience, in all its aspects, sets a limit to what is open to solution in speech. That which is beyond experience (in this case the mode of human unity) is not in need of solution.³⁸ Political ideas are based on such experiences.

IV

The function of a political idea is to describe a social reality and also to constitute that reality insofar as it functions in its descriptive role as a device of political and social persuasion and cohesion. It is in this constituting role that one initial fulcrum for critique becomes available. Already in the 1933 race books there appears to be a clear but tacit assumption that certain ways of thinking and talking about race are in some

³⁸ See “Ideology, Metaphor and Analogy,” 111.

sense “better” than others. This “better” is expressed largely in terms of the scientific cohesiveness of particular race theories that serve as a support for a variety of race symbolisms.³⁹ At the same time, however, this “better” also seems to occur at the level of “values,” which are not merely moralistic or preferential judgments—Voegelin seems to think a critique can be based on sound criteria of judgment.

The various concepts (mind, body, vital principle, etc.) that structure our thinking about our essential experiences of ourselves are derived from those same experiences that they help us to understand. These conceptualized experiences and how we interpret their relationship at the level of a speculative construction (which is meant to reflect the meaning of what we experience) represent an “ordering of the basic experiences within the process of existence, and in the comparison of the classes of being.”⁴⁰ While this ordering is a central component of a way of seeing, which can then be articulated in a philosophical anthropology, it also becomes a topic of political theory, because the political ideas that constitute a community emerge from human experiences, ordered in a particular way. The question of what is life, particularly of what is human life, moreover, is not merely a matter only for political theory, but for political practice: what is a human being and what is a race, for example, are reflected in political ideas, based on generally accepted answers to these same questions. This means that political communities constitute themselves and define for themselves their place in the world on the basis of an answer to the same question that initiates a philosophical anthropology. An interpretation of life therefore implicitly

³⁹ See especially Voegelin, *Race and State*, 37-55 [*Rasse und Staat*, 36-64].

⁴⁰ *Race and State*, 103 [*Rasse und Staat*, 104].

underlies racialist symbols of political community: symbols of race or race ideas represent one possible set of answers to the questions of what is a human being and how we should understand a community of human beings that closely resemble each other physiologically and behaviorally. Because both a philosophical anthropology and body ideas make reference to the same set of experiences, advocates of a particular body idea may base their claim to “truth” on a more empirical account of the body. Accordingly, many modern race ideas claim to be based on a “scientific” account of races.

The criteria of judgment regarding the quality of race ideas are therefore three-fold. First, all body symbols that symbolically constitute a social reality and describe it are based on accounts of human experience of reality, including the reality of human nature itself. The systematic study of such experiences in their full manifold is the purview of philosophical anthropology. Whereas primal images may be epistemologically prior to philosophical analysis, the development of the primal image into a doctrine of human nature can be examined for its comprehensiveness with regard to the panoply of human experience:

“the philosopher forms concepts and judgments, these do not contain truth in the simple sense of an *adaequatio rei ac intellectus*; their meaning cannot be simply confirmed or denied as can that of scientific concepts and statements through primary, revealing experience. Instead, the philosopher’s concepts and judgments are evaluated based on two guiding criteria: intrasystematic consistency and the breadth and depth of the primal images that are to substantiate the total system.⁴¹

Second, the systematic study of the specifically physical realm

⁴¹ Voegelin, *Race Idea*, 12 [*Rassenidee*, 10].

of human existence is the realm of the natural sciences, particularly biology, chemistry, and their sub-fields and interdisciplinary fields such as pharmaceutical chemistry, biochemistry, and the like. Race ideas are body ideas. Those who explicate these ideas in modernity do so on the basis of modern scientific discourse regarding the body. This imputed attachment forms the authority of their claim and it also supplies the point of entry for critique. One may simply test if the claims of a particular race theory that attaches itself to scientific findings are consistent with that discourse and its findings.

Third, every body idea is, by virtue of being an “idea,” a spiritual and/or intellectual formation. But such formations make claims about an empirical and/or spiritual *reality* to which they refer. And thus it is that although such symbols are not “‘theories’ in the strict sense of the word,” but symbols, they can be evaluated with respect to their “ethical and metaphysical value” because of the nature of the community they help to constitute and because of the relative amplitude or paucity of human experience they make available to those who take them up as the symbolic expression of their self-understanding. The difficult problem here, of course, is what the basis of expressing human experience will be, and what the common language of mutual critique and explication will be.⁴² Voegelin proposed a critique of contemporary race-thinking on the basis of an immanent critique of such thinking.

The nub of Voegelin’s genealogy that precedes his critique is that body ideas and ideas of the person undergo a fundamental

⁴² Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 1-11, 164-182, 342-348, 349-403.

transformation from the Christian era into modernity. The basic questions that each of these two “primal ways of seeing” the human person address, however, remain the same. The new idea of man (which underwrites modern race-ideas) treats the same human phenomena as the older, Christian idea.⁴³ Four broad categories of basic human experiences are the foundation of our various interpretations of our own nature and existence. The categories are recapitulated in the political ideas based in animate and psychical existence that inform the meaningful unity of a political order. They are also recapitulated in a formal philosophical anthropology that examines the basis in human experience of such an order. These categories are: the phenomenon of death; the inner faculties of a human being, which can be ordered in a hierarchy according to their relationship to one another; experiences of power and force both in the individual’s self-determination and self-movement and in external forces and determinations exerted on the animate self; and, the other ontic classes of being in the world (inanimate, vegetable, animal) with which man can compare himself.⁴⁴ Because the experiences all human beings have of themselves as animate beings is a central source of political ideas, a philosophical anthropology becomes a means for understanding the meaning of an entire class of political symbols that originate in human experiences of the body and the mind, including ideas of race.

The body-mind-soul link in this new conception of the human unity results in at least three possible types of body-ideas that could include race-ideas as the informing idea of a political community. In the first, human beings are seen physically to

⁴³ Voegelin, *Race Idea*, 5-8 [*Rassenidee*, 3-6].

⁴⁴ See Voegelin, *Race and State*, 19-23 [*Rasse und Staat*, 18-23].

belong to the animal kingdom. They are members of a species, homo sapiens, which can in turn be divided into sub-species, which we may call races. In this conception of human beings, however, the physical (sub-species or racial) aspects of human nature do not impinge directly upon the intellectual sphere. Nothing is said about human beings as members of a species that would not be equally valid for any animal species.⁴⁵ In such a conception of human existence, which Voegelin called a segmentary conception, the physical is cleanly and clearly divided from the other dimensions of human existence.

The second type of body-idea that Voegelin categorized was similarly segmentary. In this case, however, the physical nature of human beings affects their intellectual or mental possibilities. Although mind and body are clearly separate ontic realms, the mind is bound to the body as to a fate, even while the mind may struggle against the sensual constraints of the body. Such a conception of the relationship between mind and body may inform the entire corpus of laws, customs, and institutions of a community. One's birth, for example, may determine one's status in a community, which in turn delimits one's intellectual possibilities. In such cases, the original, "objective" idea of physical determination in a biological series is transformed into the "subjective" political ideas of dynasty, clanship, family lineage, and so forth, to which, in turn, may be attached such ideas as inheritance rights.⁴⁶

The third body idea is the most important for modern political conception of race. We may see a human being as a body permeated by mind. The body and the mind interpenetrate each other, so that the body is the mind's carrier, and the mind

⁴⁵ *Race and State*, 122-23 [*Rasse und Staat*, 122-3].

⁴⁶ *Race and State*, 123 [*Rasse und Staat*, 123].

is entirely “embodied.” The two are as one. This unitary idea of human nature is not confined to modern ideas of race: such a unitary idea existed in certain Greek ancestor cults in which the members of the cult interpreted themselves to be descended from a common ancestor from whom certain mental or spiritual traits in which they all shared had been passed on to them.⁴⁷

All three body-ideas can be used as a source for race ideas. All three are dependent upon a particular way of seeing the world, a particular way of organizing our perceptions into a coherent whole. All three are a kind of paradigm of the world. In the first case, “race” is nothing more than a way of indicating the common physiological characteristics that a group of people share and that distinguish it from other groups, however large or small. Included in such an idea of race is a conception of common biological descent or relatedness, which accounts for the shared physical characteristics of the group. The life of the mind is not thought to be directly affected by one’s race, however, and the opportunities for displaying that life are not politically circumscribed on the basis of one’s racial membership.

In the second case, the effect of race becomes more pervasive. One’s race may not affect one’s mental faculties, but it does affect one’s potential to act, because physical characteristics become a way of distinguishing social or political classes, and for assigning privilege, restrictions, or inclusions and exclusions on that basis. Race may be used to make distinctions both within a political regime and as a means of distinguishing one’s own political community from others,

⁴⁷ *Race and State*, 123 [*Rasse und Staat*, 123].

assigning relative status in the world on the basis of the racial characteristics of various groups, societies, or nations. Even in this case, however, the physical characteristics used to define a person racially may not be thought to determine intellectual or psychological faculties. They are, however, used as a means of politically and socially circumscribing the possibilities of exercising one's faculties.

In the third case, physiological and psychological characteristics or faculties interpenetrate each other so that one's "race" is a determinant of the parameters of one's intellectual, cultural, or mental capabilities and possibilities. Politically and socially, racial features become an indicator of the sum of one's "natural" faculties.⁴⁸ Seeing racially in this third manner in modernity appears to have emerged out of two unrelated but simultaneous developments: the gradual development in the biological sciences of the concept of organism, and a gradual expansion of historical, geographic, and cultural horizons of the Europeans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The first led to the conception of human beings as unitary beings, and the second led to a search for an explanation for the multiplicity of languages and cultures,

⁴⁸ We should note Voegelin's observation that like all political ideas derived from ideas of the body, race ideas are never the sole ideas that inform the order of a community; they are always only "co-generators" of a community, working in association with other political ideas (*Race and State*., 13 [*Rasse und Staat*, 14]). Ideas of the mind and its relation to the whole, moreover, are always paramount, because a political community is ultimately an intellectual construct. Race ideas only become effective when they are joined to a complex of other ideas and perspectives of human existence, most especially those that offer a symbolization for the role of the mental and spiritual in political reality (*Race and State*., 128 [*Rasse und Staat*, 127-8]).

usually situated in geographically specific locations, that were nearly always born by racially distinguishable groups. Seeing racially in the third manner is to see human beings as unitary beings, whether vitalistically or mechanistically. This unitary way of seeing, however, is misappropriated in most race theories that depend upon it.

Beginning with these three conceptions of the mind-soul-body link, a critique of race-thinking as an explication of particular race-ideas and of a description of human phenomena can be conducted on the level of the biological, the anthropological, and the “soul-characteristics” of races.

V

The biological problem in race-thinking is a boundary-problem—what is the origin of a species and of a living individual? The quest for an origin arises out of a perceived need to explain the one characteristic of living things that becomes central to all race-theories: all living individuals are members of a larger phenotypically and genotypically similar group that biologists call a species. Membership in a species is both contemporaneous and chronological: we can classify a specific group of currently existing individuals by their similar features, but we also notice that later individuals “emerge” from earlier ones. This “emergence,” we further note, includes the transmission not only of all specific characteristics that make a living individual the member of a particular species, but it also includes the transmission of specific characteristics unique to a subgroup of the species. This phenomenon of transmission or heredity underlies the racist presumption that such hereditary traits can and should form the basis of a group identity (here we return to political ideas). Whether the

observations and theoretical accounts of such a transmission in fact possess the scientific rigor race-theory required to make its historical claims tenable is doubtful at best, because the nature of individual and group, the relationship between them, and the corresponding problem of heredity cannot be articulated with the empirical precision that race-theory requires:

[I]n this quest for origins we cross the boundaries of the individual and penetrate to the parental individuals; as a result, the image of interior and exterior, which is based on the single individual taking up space, becomes meaningless. The “inner” determinants of a living form are pushed back into the formative laws of an organic substance without a determinate, permanent form, and characterized only by a periodically swelling and shrinking continuum of form throughout the course of its existence, and from this continuum we isolate certain forms as individuals. Individuals are thus not self-enclosed units but periodic knots in the continuous string of organic substance. The term “heredity” in the sense taken from the social world of transmitting an “amount” of dispositions, characteristics, abilities, and so on from one individual to another therefore loses its meaning, and biologists who are careful in their methods consider the phenomena of heredity nothing more than the existential persistence of a substance with a particular chemical and physical structure. ... The intention here is not to prove that the concept of the individual is wrongly formed, but that already with this concept—even before we have moved on to the further complications of the problem of race and species—we find ourselves in a sphere of speculative theorizing.⁴⁹

Neither the species nor the individual is an “indivisible entity.” As a result, the clear demarcation of species or sub-species (races) over against one another as reified entities is made

⁴⁹ *Race and State*, 41 [*Rasse und Staat*, 41].

more problematic. The same problem besets speculative constructions of heredity: in the “primal phenomenon of life ... the discontinuous forms are simultaneously also a true continuum:”

Thus in the concept of organic individual entity—the center of a world—with an interior and exterior, the additional problems of the formation of race and species are already inherent, since theoretically the race and species types, as “seen” phenomena, contain the same problematic as the “seen” individual. The same continuously existing organic substance that carries the determinants of the individual also contains those of the varieties, races, and species. The schema of inside-outside speculation described above is repeated for each separate variation problem of the substance.⁵⁰

The biological problems in identifying “pure lineages as the basis of the descriptive classification of man” make some anthropologists cautious in their racial description and classification.⁵¹ The attempt of race-theorists to bridge the gap between the biological focus on the physical aspects of human existence and the (correct) anthropological tendency to focus on a picture of man that includes non-somatic behavioral characteristics is methodologically unsatisfactory:

...it must have become clear by now that the anthropological concept of race does not agree with the biological one. ... that a concept must be found that satisfies both genetics and the requirements of anthropology is [a demand] without foundation, and indeed in the narrow sense this demand cannot be fulfilled because biology confines itself to the somatic sphere, but race theory distances itself from this sphere by taking the whole human being as its subject, and thus it enters a field that ... cannot be treated with the way of thinking pertaining to the somatic sphere.⁵²

⁵⁰ *Race and State*, 42-43 [*Rasse und Staat*, 42-3].

⁵¹ *Race and State*, 56 [*Rasse und Staat*, 56].

⁵² *Race and State*, 58 [*Rasse und Staat*, 59].

Voegelin's inspection of several anthropological efforts at employing race as a governing concept reveals the complete theoretical and practical impossibility of moving beyond poorly-grounded speculative attempts to unify somatic and spiritual elements into a unitary concept of race:

As a natural science, anthropology wants to use basic systematic concepts developed by biologists for the animal and plant world, but it gets into difficulties because, quite simply, human beings are not merely beings of nature, and their physical aspect in its group formation and selection is also determined by the higher principles shaping the formation of societies and states. Thus, we see anthropology moving from accurate attempts to order the multiplicity of biological phenomena of the human body by means of the mind-shaped body form... to the questionable disputes between political race theoreticians and their opponents. ...the question of the body as the basis of the community and the state must be answered on a deeper level than can be done by the misapplication of scientific categories in the realm of the human spirit....⁵³

The problem of heredity is central to the "soul-characteristic" problem that is at the heart of all race-theory and the political race-ideas it purports to support. The soul-characteristic aspect of race-theory is in turn key to understanding Voegelin's evaluation of Gustav Carus' race-theory.

A study of the soul-characteristics of identifiable groups of people are a *prima facie* legitimate study because of the experience of human totality: "Man's total being is the unified form reaching from the apex of mind down through layers of animal and vegetative animation down to inanimate matter."⁵⁴ The experiences of this totality can be separated out: "the

⁵³ *Race and State*, 62-3 [*Rasse und Staat*, 63-4].

⁵⁴ *Race and State*, 64 [*Rasse und Staat*, 64].

realities of matter, soul, and spirit can be experienced as parts of our whole being and at the same time have their status in this whole being as ensouled matter, as spirit-permeated matter and body.”⁵⁵ Out of this and other fundamental experiences such as sexual reproduction and human speciation amidst diversity emerges the speculative possibility that psychical or spiritual traits may be hereditary:

Since the human spirit is human—that is, not a body-less spirit but joined with the body into a unified whole—we will always have reason to state that man as a whole is involved in the process of the succession of generations and that all his traits, including spiritual ones, are related to so-called hereditary transmission. However, it does not follow from this fact what race theorists deduce from it and what their opponents combat with unsuitable arguments, namely, the fatality, the inescapability of the structure and of the individual’s development in the way it turns out for each one.⁵⁶

The problem that all race-theories confront is to conjoin the physical realm of determinacy with the mental/spiritual realm that is at least partially a realm of freedom. This problem of conjoining a causal realm of determinacy with a realm of freedom in a single living being is treated to its roots in Kant’s *Third Antinomy* in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and it forms a central problem in the philosophical speculations of thinkers as diverse as Hegel, Fichte, and Nietzsche.⁵⁷

Their lack of theoretical sophistication prevents most race theorists from pursuing this dichotomy to its necessary conclusion, because they want, without good methodological

⁵⁵ *Race and State*, 65 [*Rasse und Staat*, 65].

⁵⁶ *Race and State*, 65 [*Rasse und Staat*, 65].

⁵⁷ Michael Allen Gillespie: *Hegel, Heidegger, and the Ground of History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 30-55.

reasons, to affirm both sides of Kant's antinomy. Some "traits and dispositions" that form "the basic framework of the mental type concerned are inheritable," while others seem to be the product of tradition, education, and cultural transmission, hence from the realm of freedom. If race theory provides no clear demarcation of the two realms and leaves undefined the essence of either inheritable or freely (intellectually) transmitted traits, then such a theory can only create the "illusion" that it adequately treats the traits that emerge from either realm.⁵⁸

The "hereditary transmission of mental traits" becomes for Voegelin the leitmotif of his analysis and evaluation of five different race-theories.⁵⁹ In every case, the soul-mind-body problem trips up the endeavor to classify races in terms of heredity of psychical characteristics. Most race-theories "take the biological fact of the existence of races as their point of departure and then have trouble to get to the inherently anthropological problem..." The most successful of them begins with the fact that "society is mind," not body, and then demonstrates that this realm of determined indeterminacy is "compatible with the facts of animal existence."⁶⁰ Even here, however, race-thinking encounters close restrictions:

The biological laws of heredity, in particular the Mendelian laws in their more recent version, point to the constant recurrence of certain traits and the law of their recurrence, but they leave room for the unique characteristics of each human being. They give the law of the constancy of certain traits, but they have nothing to say about variation—neither individual variation nor the origin of species and races.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Voegelin, *Race and State*, 67 [*Rasse und Staat*, 67].

⁵⁹ *Race and State*, 71-113 [*Rasse und Staat*, 71-116].

⁶⁰ *Race and State*, 112 [*Rasse und Staat*, 114].

⁶¹ *Race and State*, 112 [*Rasse und Staat*, 114-15].

At best, race can be “a stylistic law of mental gesture and expression, which thoroughly governs mind, soul, and body.”⁶² This conclusion points to the further conclusion that a history of a so-called race is, in fact, an intellectual history.⁶³ The link to a biological concept of species becomes tentative indeed.

VI

Carl Gustav Carus, Voegelin remarked, “put the finishing touches on race theory” in the mid-nineteenth century.⁶⁴ The race theory of Carus is a niveau from which the later race theories descend, not one they supersede. The race theories of modernity, recall, are the product of a new primal vision of human being, that entails an “internalization of the person” over against the transcendent conception of the soul given in the Christian manner of seeing. They are a problematic version of this way of seeing, because they make theoretically and scientifically untenable links between the mind and body along the freedom-determinism axis of individuality and heredity.

For Carus, however, a vision of the “self-contained total being,” which has its roots in the philosophical-anthropological developments especially of Kant, Schiller, and Humboldt, creates a theory of the well-born individual who (in the person of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe) constitutes and epitomizes a new body-spirit unity.⁶⁵ Over against the pre-

⁶² *Race and State*, 112 [*Rasse und Staat*, 115].

⁶³ *Race and State*, 113 [*Rasse und Staat*, 115].

⁶⁴ *Race and State*, 157 [*Rasse und Staat*, 157].

⁶⁵ *Race and State*, 169 [*Rasse und Staat*, 169]; Voegelin, *Race Idea*, 154-168 [*Rassenidee*, 135-48].

Enlightenment, quasi-Platonic Christian vision in which “spirit and body are ... two opposing principles within the totality of the individual, serving more to disintegrate rather than build up its complete essence,” the new way of seeing envisions them as “complementary moments of the person, complementing each other in building up the whole.” The body, moreover, is no longer “an embarrassing earthly remnant that thwarts perfection,” but a “foundation without whose good constitution a wide-ranging and free unfolding of the spirit is impossible.”⁶⁶ Consistent with the phenomenon of heredity, moreover, Carus understands physical and spiritual “health” to pertain not only to the great individual, but also to “the line that begat him.”⁶⁷ Health and disease become features not of the body (or mind or soul) alone, but of the body-mind-soul unity. Indeed, the dependence of the soul and mind on the body can be reversed in some cases, so that the energy of the psyche builds up the body into a beautifully organized great individual.⁶⁸

Carus’ race theory develops, according to Voegelin, out of the perceptions of inequalities and differences between both persons and communities of persons. To account for such differences, Carus develops a theory of racial types that is based on a theory of the immanent soul. In other words, Carus carries out in a consequent manner a theory of racial differences based on a fully developed theory of the immanent person that takes into account the full panoply of human experiences and human phenomena. Or does it?

For all that Voegelin praises Carus’ theory, it remains

⁶⁶ *Race Idea*, 169 [*Rassenidee*, 149].

⁶⁷ *Race Idea*, 169 [*Rassenidee*, 149]; cf. Voegelin, “Growth,” 305.

⁶⁸ Voegelin, *Race Idea*, 172 [*Rassenidee*, 152].

astonishingly parochial. The “great individual,” for example, can only come into being “when supported and surrounded by an outstanding race—namely, the day peoples.”⁶⁹ This vastly superior race has produced that vastly superior (northern European) personality—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe—that becomes the model of excellence for the immanent personality. Its superiority is also indicated in its rich national subdivisions, its global colonization, its explorations, and its cultural and artistic achievements. Voegelin seems to redeem this racialist triumphalism with a concluding observation that Carus leads us again into the role that race ideas play in shaping a community:

Race is no longer merely the object of scrutiny, seen at a distance; but a body-soul-spirit reality that includes the scholar himself, and the concept of race that is formed in the concrete situation is no longer a scientific concept but a tool for interpreting the meaning of one’s own life and the broader life of the community. It is not merely the creation of a passive attempt at “understanding,” but an instrument in the service of the future shaping of the community; it is the idea of the community as a bodily context as it is projected into the future by its members.⁷⁰

Such a reflection may well lead one to see Voegelin’s study as a valorization of race-thinking or an example of idealist and elitist German conservatism.⁷¹ Following the Weberian method of neutrality, Voegelin engages race-thinking at the levels of natural science (biology), anthropological studies of human phenomena, but only partially at the level of a developed philosophical anthropology. Missing from his account, and missing from Voegelin’s approval of “the breadth

⁶⁹ *Race Idea*, 178 [*Rassenidee*, 158].

⁷⁰ *Race Idea*, 179-80 [*Rassenidee*, 160].

⁷¹ Rod Stackelberg, Review of Thomas Heilke, *Voegelin on the Idea of Race*, in *The American Historical Review* (October, 1991), 1191.

of mind and depth of insight with which Carus fathoms the world” is an account of the life of reason, understood in the classical sense.⁷²

A life conceived in this way seems nearly an anachronism in this context: it is not accessible to a way of seeing that rejects a transcendental perspective, because pre-Enlightenment reason is made experientially available only through an ordering experience of transcendence, and Enlightenment conceptions of reason deny the availability and validity of such experiences. Voegelin’s analysis of Kant’s treatment of this problem makes clear that he was already well aware of it at least in the Kantian terms of infinity and human mortality.⁷³ The Kantian system, however, is a transit point that rejects a Platonic, Aristotelian, or Thomistic account of reason, but that equally rejects the immanentization in the later primal way of seeing the immanent person:

There is no remedy in the Kantian system for these difficulties since the reason of the individual has the same structure as that of the whole species and the problem of uniting an image of human totality of the person is not yet clearly seen.... The idea of the totality of humanity is certainly there, but it can be imagined only as a whole made up of fragments; the individual is not yet a self-contained personality, a meaningful unique existence in itself, but rather a particular kind of center of forces, one that develops its faculties one-sidedly, no matter how much this specialization contradicts the idea of man.⁷⁴

This self-contained individual, whose perfections perfect in the present the community of the imperfect from which he arises, first comes into sight with Schiller’s idea of the

⁷² Voegelin, *Race Idea*, 178 [*Rassenidee*, 158].

⁷³ *Race Idea*, 147-153 [*Rassenidee*, 128-34].

⁷⁴ *Race Idea*, 154, 155 [*Rassenidee*, 135, 136].

immanently perfected person represented by Goethe:

The way out of the circle is found with the introduction of an apolitical source of humanitarianism—a way that was not open to Kant because for him practical humanity was nothing more than the existence of man under the moral law out of pure reason, and the problematic of the infinity of the rational substance was precisely the basis for the circle. For Kant, finite reason was by nature corrupt and could never be the source of a pure, meaningful fulfillment of earthly existence. But the idea of the perfect man, whose perfection of being in this earthly life could be the impetus for an improvement of human character in society, had become conceivable through the actual appearance of such a man, ... Goethe.⁷⁵

VII

Thirty years after publishing this evaluation, Voegelin would repeat a lesson, learned from Plato and Aristotle, that “the quality of a society depends on the degree to which the life of reason... becomes a creative force in that society.”⁷⁶ The life of reason as Voegelin conceives of it here is not given by an “idea” of reason or by a nominalist “definition” of it, as in a Hobbesian notion of “ratiocination,” but by an experience of a “process in reality” in which concrete human beings ... [are] engaged in an act of resistance against the personal and social disorder of their age.⁷⁷ This process leads to a discovery of “reason in the noetic sense ... as both the force and the criterion of order.” Or, in David Walsh’s words:

⁷⁵ *Race Idea*, 159-60 [*Rassenidee*, 139-140].

⁷⁶ Eric Voegelin, “Industrial Society in Search of Reason,” in R. Aron (ed.), *World Technology and Human Destiny* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 34.

⁷⁷ Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis* (Gerhart Niemeyer, ed. and trans.) (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 89.

There is ... a philosophy of consciousness that can articulate the truth of this [rediscovered Christian] existential insight. It consists in showing how the assertion of a transcendent moral order is an elaboration of the structure of consciousness that is more or less transparent to all human beings. This is not a particular or idiosyncratic point of view; it is an explication of what everyone knows, and can be everywhere verified. Nor does it require special efforts of introspection to identify it, since it can be confirmed in the overt expressions of our world. Even those who deny the reality of good and evil or reject the reality of divine order nevertheless reveal the extent to which “they know that reality moves not only into a future of things but toward their Beyond.”⁷⁸

Out of this experience and the discovery of reason as an ordering force develops a set of inquiries into the meaning of history as a series of events, into the order and meaning of society, into the order and meaning of the individual soul, and into the order and meaning of transcendence as experienced in and through the soul. Such experiences deny the value of the demonic epitome that Goethe represents, not within the primal image of the immanent personality, but beyond it. Weberian neutrality is exchanged for noetic insight.⁷⁹

The Enlightenment, out of which arises the new primal manner of seeing life generally and then human life specifically as an immanently ordered force, demotes classical reason or *nous* to “world-immanent *ratio* and that ratio is at the same time hypostasized as an autonomous source of

⁷⁸ David Walsh, *After Ideology: Recovering the Spiritual Foundations of Freedom* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 221.

⁷⁹ The “Introduction” to *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952) is particularly helpful here. See especially pp. 6, 14-22.

truth.”⁸⁰ For the life of reason conceived and experienced in the classical sense, this demotion is a disordering that must be resisted. The as-yet to appear experience of *nous* is substituted in part in Voegelin’s early work by the critiques he offers on the basis of biological, anthropological, and philosophical-anthropological theory. These, Voegelin later argued, “proved sufficient for the purpose of analyzing the race problem.” An analysis of ideologies, however, requires the insights of Christian and classical philosophy to arrive at an adequate critique from the perspective of political theory.⁸¹ Only these insights, Voegelin would then argue, could properly fashion an act of resistance to the deeper disorder of race-thinking, including the immanentist revolt against reason that underlies it, but that Voegelin’s critiques in 1933 could not fully identify.⁸²

The “absence” in all race-theory is the result of a “new way of seeing.” This absence includes the loss of the transcendent pole of human experience. Out of this loss develops a new view of human nature that moves hand-in-hand with new immanentist doctrines of animate nature in general.⁸³ Race-theory embodies the absence of reason—understood as *nous*—as an ordering force in the soul. This absence tends also to create other absences—experiences of “faith,” “hope,” and “trust,” for example—because the presence of these

⁸⁰ Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 87.

⁸¹ Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections* (Ellis Sandoz, ed.) (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 38, 39.

⁸² Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 113. Voegelin’s characterization in 1940 of Carus’ race-theory as “pagan” indicates the move to the new basis of analysis (“Growth,” 306).

⁸³ Voegelin, *Race Idea*, 96-98 [*Rassenidee*, 82-84].

experiences depends on the ordering force of *nous*.⁸⁴ This absence is filled by the experience of fear, by “an arousal in which the total existence is experience as fatally threatened, not indeed by attack from a specific external direction but internally, by a metaphysical annihilation of existence; it is a horror not only of earthly death but of total annihilation.”⁸⁵ Race-thinking can be the political expression of a particular community that “overcomes its fear of its forlornness by claiming for itself the status of ‘world’ and regarding all others as ‘non-world,’ as forlorn.”⁸⁶ The “cure” for such triumphalist yet nihilistic expressions of fear can only be—in Voegelin’s later analysis—a return to the divine ordering of *nous* in its height and its depth. It is true that one can, as Voegelin did, uncover the logical and methodological inconsistencies of a particular pattern of thinking. Only in a luminous ordering given through *nous*, however, can one develop a philosophical anthropology that covers the expanse of human experience and returns the thinker to the truth of order.

The basic outlines of such a philosophical anthropology are perhaps most clearly articulated in Voegelin’s 1974 essay, “Reason: The Classic Experience.”⁸⁷ The work of this period covers an array of topics and questions, ranging from the phenomenon of “second realities” in ideological systems, to Hegel’s political philosophy, to the relationship between

⁸⁴ Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1968), 16-18, 111-114.

⁸⁵ Voegelin, *Race and State*, 151 [*Rasse und Staat*, 152].

⁸⁶ *Race and State*, 152 [*Rasse und Staat*, 152].

⁸⁷ Eric Voegelin, “Reason: The Classic Experience,” in Ellis Sandoz, ed., *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 12, *Published Essays: 1966-1985*, 265-291; originally published in *Southern Review*, n.s., X(1974)m 237-64.

Christianity and pagan culture in antiquity, to the state of the modern German university. Several of the essays from this time are demonstrably concerned with problems of philosophical anthropology, but “Reason” most decisively treats the central question of such a study, and its treatment of the mind-body-spirit problem most clearly recalls the problems of the two 1933 race books.

As in Carus’ race-theory, so here Voegelin takes into account the plenitude of human experience as a totality. To recall: “man’s total being is the unified form reaching from the apex of mind down through layers of animal and vegetative animation down to inanimate matter.”⁸⁸ By the 1940s, however, Voegelin has added the transcendental dimension of human experience that is missing in Carus; this new element instigates the temptation to “spiritualize” Voegelin’s earlier political theory. The classical experience of reason includes an experience of “moving forces behind reason”⁸⁹—life and death—that can be differentiated and added to those aspects of human experience that are admitted in Carus’ schema. This set of experiences, expressed as a unit in Plato’s symbol of the *metaxy* or “in-between,” adds new levels to the hierarchy of being in which human beings participate. At the upper end, Voegelin introduces a pole of existence variously symbolized as the “divine ground,” or the divine “Beyond,” or the divine nous.⁹⁰ At the other end, he introduces the pole of non-existence, the *apeiron*, or the “depth,” or the “nothing.”

This Platonic/Aristotelian expansion of the categories of human experience and existence with which Carus operates,

⁸⁸ Voegelin, *Race and State*, 64 [*Rasse und Staat*, 64].

⁸⁹ Voegelin, “Reason,” 281.

⁹⁰ “Reason,” 290.

with its attendant new symbols, is materially the rediscovery of an ancient science of man and politics. Voegelin held Plato and Aristotle to have founded this science, which, “in its essentials [including its “subject matter, analytical method, and anthropological assumptions”] . . . is still valid today.”⁹¹ From a reconsideration of this science, Voegelin developed a simple diagram “of the points to be considered in any study of human affairs.”⁹² The diagram serves as a scientific instrument—incorporating a complete philosophical anthropology—for the critical evaluation of doctrines, dogmas, and complete ideological systems concerning human nature. Laying out seven levels of human being on a vertical scale (Divine Nous; Psyche—Noetic; Psyche—Passions; Animal nature; Vegetative nature; Inorganic nature; Apeiron—Depth), combined with the three basic ranges of human existence as individual, social, and historical, Voegelin points out the critical usefulness of the schematic. It provides students a valuable “minimum body of objective criteria for *true* and *false* in their struggle with the flood of contemporary opinion literature.” Second, it allows them to “classify false theoretical propositions by assigning them their place in the grid.” Finally, it has an “important psychological effect of overcoming the students’ sense of disorientation and lostness in the unmanageable flood of false opinions that presses in on them every day.”⁹³

The crucial missing component of this grid that distinguishes it from the race-theory of Carus and to which I have alluded several times in this paper is its recognition that “human being” is not self-contained. It thereby forms an implicit

⁹¹ Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, 15.

⁹² Eric Voegelin, “Reason,” 289.

⁹³ “Reason,” 290-291.

critique of all racialist thinking, including even its “best” form as presented by Carus. It was Voegelin’s realization that any adequate philosophical anthropology must systematically take into account the human experience of transcendence or its absence that led him to reject his own *History of Political Ideas*⁹⁴ and that enabled him to supersede the niveau to which Carus had brought an immanentist science of man. The recovery of a fuller philosophical anthropology should be considered a supersession of Carus’ theory only in the strict sense of providing a more adequate account of human phenomena. This “supersession” is the result of an *addition* to what is already present in Carus’ theory. This addition of the transcendent element and its opposing pole of the *apeiron* is certainly more than a mere modification of Carus’ theory, since it radically re-orientes our way of seeing. On the other hand, we avoid neo-Platonic mysticisms and other deformations of reality only by keeping in mind that an adequate philosophical anthropology takes into account all twenty-one cells of Voegelin’s schematic, including those already contained in the race theory of Carus.⁹⁵ The insights provided by experiences of the transcendent and their articulations do not yet appear in Voegelin’s 1933 critique of race theory. It is only out of the later expansion of the horizon of human experience to include an awareness of participation in the transcendent mystery of being that Voegelin could

⁹⁴ See Thomas Hollweck and Ellis Sandoz, “General Introduction to the Series,” in Eric Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, vol. 1, *Hellenism, Rome and Early Christianity*, Athanasios Moulakis ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 1-47; and David Walsh, “Editor’s Introduction,” in Eric Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, vol. 3, *The Later Middle Ages*, David Walsh, ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 1-9.

⁹⁵ Cf., Voegelin, “Reason,” 280-281, 290-291.

develop the concepts of a richer philosophical anthropology that moves us beyond constructions like the race-idea, even while our feet remain firmly planted on the ground in our analysis of political phenomena.

Abstract/Zusammenfassung

In 1933, Eric Voegelin published two books on the European race idea. One concerned itself primarily with an intellectual history of the race idea in Europe, while the other was a thoroughgoing treatment of the race idea as a European political idea. Together, these two books remind us of the effect that specifically physical dimensions of human existence have on political self-interpretation. They also remind us of the dangers of severing the psychical and physical aspects of our being from one another, or of misunderstanding their interrelationships, especially when these disturbances and misunderstandings are transferred into the political realm. While most contemporary interpretations of Voegelin's work place nearly exclusive weight on his postwar work, emphasizing his analyses of the balance of consciousness, spiritual freedom, and other, seemingly less "concrete" aspects of political life, Voegelin seems in these two books to call his readers to recover a balance of body symbols. The present essay considers what such a recovery would appear to entail. First, it briefly explores Voegelin's early concept of a "political idea," which is followed, second, by an examination of Voegelin's concept of "primal images" and certain problems surrounding it. Third, it reviews the problem of vision in a philosophical anthropology that includes a concept of primal images. As it then moves on to consider Voegelin's seemingly laudatory appraisal of Carl Gustav Carus' race theory, it examines what appears to be a kind of Weberian relativism lurking in Voegelin's work on race. In conclusion, the essay reflects on the missing element of analysis in the race books and the effect of this absence on Voegelin's evaluation of the European race idea, and it

examines the way in which Voegelin's appraisal of the race theory of Carus in 1933 seems to anticipate certain features of his later, mature philosophical anthropology.

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