

OCCASIONAL PAPERS

ERIC-VOEGELIN-ARCHIV
LUDWIG-MAXIMILIANS-UNIVERSITÄT
MÜNCHEN

— XXVII —

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Voegelin's Israel and Revelation:
The Reception and Challenge in America



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William M. Thompson,
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For the Eric Voegelin Societies and Friends

Congenial “Partners in the Community of Being”

“The relationship between the life of the spirit and life in the world is the problem that lies unresolved at the bottom of the Israelite difficulties. Let us hasten to say that the problem by its nature is not capable of a solution valid for all times. Balances that work for a while can be found and have been found. But habituation, institutionalization, and ritualization inevitably, by their finiteness, degenerate sooner or later into a captivity of the spirit that is infinite; and then the time has come for the spirit to break a balance that has become demonic imprisonment. Hence, no criticism is implied when the problem is characterized as unresolved. But precisely because the problem is unsolvable on principle, an inestimable importance attaches to its historically specific states of irresolution.”

Eric Voegelin, *Israel and Revelation*

Introductory Note

Is the inaugural volume of the series *Order and History*, namely, *Israel and Revelation*, a period piece, or does it remain central to that series' enduring validity? And if so, in what precise way? Its recent fortieth anniversary of publication occasioned a new look at this important work in America, which provides us with a lens onto the American reception in general. This American reception may in turn be of some help to the work's reception elsewhere, as it undergoes translation. By “reception” in the first place we do not mean an exposition of the various reviews, but rather some reflections on what is entailed in reception itself, especially in the light of insights provided us by *Israel and Revelation*. This

will enable us to then more manageably and perhaps more meaningfully ruminate on how “the” reception seems to have played itself out on the American scene (U. S. and Canadian) and to consider some of the continuing challenges involved. Challenges to whom, we might well ask? This is indeed one of the questions arising continually from Voegelin’s endeavor. He himself was something of a polymath and polyhistor, his work extending into the intersecting frontiers of the major fields of the humane sciences. It stands to reason then that the challenge of his work will have something of a pluralistic character to it. If this is true of his work in a general way, it is equally true of the volume under consideration here.

Dimensions of “Reception” as Suggested in *Israel and Revelation*

“Reception” is itself one of those loaded words in today’s humanities, evoking a range of positions among modern, late modern, and postmodern hermeneuts. Typically reception theory is thought of as stressing the subject pole in the object-subject duality or relation, the object pole being the “text” and the subject pole being the interpreter of the text. I suppose one could say with some irony that a modern reception theorist would approach the text through the lens of modern, physical science; the late modern, with a sense of suspicion shaped by Freud, or Marx, or even Nietzsche; and the postmodern, well here we move in the direction of textual dismemberment through intertextuality. The subject is decentered, and not surprisingly, so too is the text. The object pole increasingly seems to vanish into an ever fluctuating subject pole as one moves from modernity to postmodernity.

This schema, somewhat suggested in irony, would supply us with one perspective on the reception accorded *Israel and Revelation*. It is helpful, despite its broad strokes, because it alerts us immediately to what we can name, inspired by Voegelin, not the “subjective” side of the issue of reception, but the spiritual dimension of the issue. Issues of reception bring us to issues of spirituality. We can name this the Plato shadow of reception: As the polis is the soul writ large, so reception is a modality of the soul. This, I think, is a position inspired by Voegelin, and it is the position I find myself aligned with. Repeatedly Voegelin lamented the separation between science (in his humane sense) and spirituality and sought to overcome it. And so, in a first approximation to our theme, we suggest that issues of reception might be fruitfully adjudicated in terms of whether and how the receiver has approached the relationship between science and spirituality.

In the celebrated “introduction” to *Israel and Revelation*, which serves also as the introduction to the entire series of *Order and History*, Voegelin used the symbol of “participation” rather than of “reception” in his own equivalent articulation of the structure of reception, perhaps we can say. He was proposing an alternative to the language of the subjective interpreter confronting an object, i.e., the text as an object. We are likely quite familiar with the basic elements studied in the introduction: the “quaternarian structure” of God and human beings, world and society, as comprising the “partners in the community of being.” This partnership oscillates on a vast range from compactness to differentiation in quality of experience and symbolization, and regression is nearly as notable as progression. For our theme, the fact that we cannot find a perspective outside of this partnership means that knowledge comes by way of participation in the

community rather than by way of neutral observation outside of it. Rather than “reception,” then, Voegelin would seem to suggest “participation” as a more adequate articulation of what we are about. Let us work with this for awhile.

Participation emphasizes the “between” experience: We are within the community of being, not outside it. This in turn presupposes an “organic” view of reality, not in the totalistic sense attacked by Levinas and postmodern thinkers, but in the sense that we are actors in a larger drama, rather than “self-contained” spectators. Right away, however, Voegelin wants to avoid the problems of the isolated subject and the subject-object dualism so characteristic of the modern age. Reception, inasmuch as it might play into this, would not bring greater clarity to the problems. At the same time, in this introduction Voegelin seems to absorb many or all of the concerns suggested by the language of “reception.” For reception highlights the receiver and interestingly stresses the dimension of “passivity” involved in coming to know. Here Voegelin will speak of “attunement,” which of course brings out the focus on the implied reality to which one is attuned. Hence, attunement, like participation, avoids a subject-object split. Participation stresses the active side; attunement, the “passive” or “receptive” side. But both are more organic. Participation is active but modest. There is an element of humility to it. One needs to own up to one’s place within the drama of the community, and the posture is one of sharing with rather than making the community conform to oneself (the tendency in subjectivist reception theory). And most daringly here in the introduction, Voegelin writes that “we act our role in the greater play of the divine being that enters passing existence in order to redeem precarious being for eternity.” Our quality of

participation may be mutual with that of the divine partner. It is not equal, it would seem.

What difference would that make – this “greater play of the divine being” – to the quality of our reception-become-participation? This brings us nearer to the importance of *Israel and Revelation* and Israel’s own contribution to “participatory reception.” In the introduction Voegelin writes of the “mystery of being,” which becomes somewhat transparent as we participate within it. Our attunement to this mystery enables us to attend to “the silent voices of conscience and grace in human existence.” “Grace,” of course, connects with the greater play of the divine being, and evokes the sense that our receiving is also a greater being gifted. This promotes something of an epistemological and practical optimism and hopefulness. Unlike the hermeneuts of suspicion, our first move and our ultimate posture is positive rather than negative, affirming rather than suspecting and denying. Voegelin here uses another Plato symbol, that of “play,” along with the symbol of grace, and they light up one another. Reception as a moment of participation shares in the creative and carefree divine play. There is “necessity” in life, but no determinism in the strict sense: “The role of existence must be *played* in uncertainty of its meaning, as an adventure of decision on the edge of freedom and necessity.”¹ Unlike radical postmodern social determinism, for whom texts and their readers are but so many victims of societal forces and drives, participatory reception, while limited, can transcend the forces of society

¹ Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 1, *Israel and Revelation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956; available: Columbia: University of Missouri Press), 1, my emphasis. All references to the introduction in this section are from pp. 1-11. *Israel and Revelation* hereafter will be abbreviated “*IR*.”

and its various “isms” and hear the true logos. At the same time, this ability to hear the logos through participation provides the hermeneutics of tranquility and trust with the norm in the light of which the fall from truth can be diagnosed. In the introduction Voegelin writes of the “experience of obligation” – we might say “conscience” – through which we discern attunement and its lack. In the celebrated “preface” he writes of philosophy’s inseparable diagnostic and therapeutic functions. Because we are in tune with the logos, we have a basic therapy in the light of which we can diagnose the fall from truth.² Participatory reception is both diagnostic and therapeutic.

I have spent some time with this because if we are going to benefit from a look at the various ways in which *Israel and Revelation* has been received, we will benefit greatly from the elements of a “reception theory” found already in this work. Inevitably we will need to face these larger questions in any evaluation of the state of Voegelin-reception, and perhaps these few comments might be suggestive focal points for this discussion. I offer them here in that spirit. I do myself agree with them, particularly as augmented by Voegelin himself in his later writings. After all, as Voegelin himself noted, again in the preface, history’s intelligibility is “a reality to be discerned retrospectively in a flow of events that extends, through the present of the observer, indefinitely into the future.”³ The key augmentation perhaps needing mention just now is the more calibrated distinction but not separation between luminosity and intentionality found most amply in the final volume of *Order and History*. One notes within the introduction of *Israel*

² Ibid., xiv.

³ Ibid., ix.

and Revelation what seems like a strong desire to avoid falling into the post-Kantian subject-object dualisms. Hence participation is not a “datum of experience” in the sense of something “given in the manner of an object of the external world.” Rather, Voegelin continues, it is “knowable only from the perspective of participation within it.”⁴

This desire to avoid subject-object language continues as well throughout volumes two, three, and even four, to some extent. With volume five, however, there seems to be a fuller articulation of the relationship between participatory knowing and the kind of knowing involving subjects intending objects. Participatory knowing is now considered the more comprehensive experience, and it is named “luminosity.” That is, within the experience of participation luminosity in varying degrees of differentiation occurs. Included within this as a less comprehensive yet real factor, likely because of the somatic nature of our human existence, we do have the experience of being subjects intending objects. Symbol is the linguistic medium of the more comprehensive participation, while concept is intentionality’s medium. The first is more typical of the humane sciences; the latter, of the natural sciences. The borders between each remain fluid, and intentionality derails when it forgets its greater rootedness within the more comprehensive luminosity. Yet luminosity can become a gnosticism when it denies that it too must use the language of thing reality and when it tries to out-transcend itself and its somatic rootedness.⁵

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵ Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 5, *In Search of Order*, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 18, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 28-33, 119.

This last augmentation is particularly relevant to the reception of *Israel and Revelation*, because questions have been raised about Voegelin's lack of appreciation of the institutional, "somatic" expressions of Israel's faith. While not necessarily agreeing with all of these reservations, still this greater refinement of the thing-like dimension of human existence would seem helpful in clarifying some of these issues. This touches not only upon the reception by others, but also upon Voegelin's own "reception" so to speak of Israel and thus his book *Israel and Revelation*.

The other elements involved in reception, particularly the quaternarian structure of reality and one's participatory attunement within it, can immediately be understood as critical in one's evaluation of *Israel and Revelation*. Let us dwell on a few of the more salient aspects of this, before moving into "the" reception itself. How valid, so to speak, is this symbol of the quaternity of which Voegelin writes and within which we are said to dwell? Right away one might argue that there is a touch of Hegel's shadow here in this rather sweeping Gestalt, or even some similarities with the *Geviert* of Heidegger. (These are observations noted by others as well, the Hegel shadow already being noted in the first generation of reviews of *Order and History* 1-3).⁶ It is Hegelian in its cosmic sweep;

⁶ See William F. Albright, Review of *IR*, *Theological Studies* 22 (1961): 270-79; and Herman Anton Chroust, Review of *Order and History*, vols. 2-3, *The Thomist* 2 (1957): 381-91. For Heidegger's quadrate of earth, sky, mortals, gods, see, for example, Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking" (trans. Albert Hofstadter), in *Basic Writings: From **Being and Time** (1927) to **The Task of Thinking** (1964)*, rev. ed., ed. David Farrell Krell (Harper San Francisco, 1993), 347-63; cf. John Macquarrie, *Heidegger and Christianity* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 65. For Voegelin on Heidegger, see Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, trans. and ed. Gerhart Niemeyer (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978; reprint: Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 79; and *Science, Politics and*

it is at least partially parallel to Heidegger in that, as Heidegger moved back to the pre-Socratics in an effort to think being anew in its more originary, premetaphysical sources, so Voegelin as well seeks to return to the originating experiences. Let us grant the similarities: Voegelin argued with Hegel, but he thought of him as a great philosopher, and swam in the same sources, like Heidegger. Yet the decisive caesura between Voegelin on the one hand and Hegel and Heidegger on the other is the divine ground of the quaternarian structure, which means that, to use the language of a later Voegelin, the quaternity always out-comprehends us, rather than our out-comprehending it. This again is not what Hegel aspires to. Heidegger, on the other hand, seems to banish the divine ground to such a distance that we cannot hear a possible message from “it.” This would again seem to presuppose an Archimedean point outside and beyond the quaternity which can know and dictate its furthest possibilities. Thus the later Voegelin, despite crediting Heidegger with seeking to overcome the subject-object dualism and with breaking through the limitations of intentionalist epistemology, sensed an element of gnosticism in Heidegger.

The origins of the quaternity in Voegelin’s thought would seem to have been an insight gained from his own study of early myth. The notion of “consubstantiality” was one used in

Gnosticism: Two Essays, first essay trans. William J. Fitzpatrick, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 5, *Modernity without Restraint*, ed. Manfred Henningsen (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 275-76; also Christian Schwaabe, *Seinsvergessenheit und Umkehr: Über das „Richtige Denken“ bei Eric Voegelin und Martin Heidegger*, *Occasional Papers* 5, ed. Peter J. Opitz and Dietmar Herz (Munich: Eric-Voegelin-Archiv, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, 1997).

Egyptology, and Voegelin credits this as the source of his use in part one of *Israel and Revelation*, which is concerned with the cosmological experience and symbolism of Near Eastern societies.⁷ Voegelin did not seem over much concerned with its “validation.” This is perhaps an example of his hermeneutics of trust of the great texts: They attest to such originating experiences – in this case, the consubstantiality of the partners in the community of being – and the interpreter’s own experience resonates with this and finds in it an analogous confirmation. As we know, issues of validation or “legitimation” in the modern jargon were issues of “topicality” in Voegelin’s pejorative sense, often emblematic of “modern anxiety” and relativism. We could say, following Ellis Sandoz’ view, that Voegelin relies largely on common sense, or on the accuracy of the prescientific articulation of reality found in the myths of consubstantiality.⁸ Here common sense also seems to evoke the experience which creates the sense of the “common” or “community.” Our experience of community is always already there; science’s role is not to tamper with that or create topical questions about how to find our way to it, but to humbly accept it and work within the flow of it. Obviously the tone of our experience of community (with the partners in being) is subject to the to-and-fro movement of compactness and differentiation. And not a little of the debate

⁷ *IR*, 84, referring to J. A. Wilson in H. Frankfort, et al., *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 65ff.

⁸ Ellis Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution: A Biographical Introduction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 29, 164; Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 211-13. For “topicality,” see, for example, Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4, *The Ecumenic Age*, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 17, ed. Michael Franz (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 181-85.

surrounding *Israel and Revelation* has to do with whether it adequately grasps Israel's key contributions to the differentiation of community substance.

If we seek to move beyond the level of common sense to a more “scientific” articulation of the matter, we need to go to later or supplementary sources in Voegelin, where he provides us with some direction. As we do, at times we find that he manifests something of his formation in German idealism, and offers formulations which sound similar to the “transcendental conditions of possibility” found in the Kantian transcendental philosophical traditions. “The substantive unity of human existence,” he writes, “which must be accepted as ontological hypothesis for the understanding of consciousness’s basis in body and matter, is objectively inexperienceable.” But he importantly cautions that rather than this meaning that there is no such thing, “the hypothesis is indispensable for grasping the ‘ensemble’ of consciousness and bodily process in the total process of human existence.” In this same essay he makes it clear that this “substantive unity of human existence” entails a consciousness within the nexus of society, history, and cosmos.⁹

An important difference between this formulation of the matter from that found in transcendental schools is that Voegelin speaks of accepting an ontological hypothesis, rather than of presenting a philosophical demonstration. His is the language of acceptance rather than proof in the typical sense. This scientific elaboration of the consubstantial myth in the essay just noted, thus, is not a “proven” view of the matter, but rather a humble acceptance of what is entailed by living within

⁹ Eric Voegelin, “On the Theory of Consciousness,” in *Anamnesis*, 31ff.

it. There is a philosopher's differentiation of dimensions and implications, but this does not render the originating experience "proven" in the sense that we are dispensed from personal commitment. The originating experience is the richer, not to be out-comprehended source of the so-called scientific elaboration. The language of "ontological hypothesis," used in this essay on consciousness already written in 1943, went through a further refinement and move away from arguments like "transcendental conditions of the possibility" type as Voegelin thought through some of the problems entailed in "ontology," an enterprise which he came to regard as rather encrusted in too much "doctrinal" hypostatization. I hope I am correct in noting that Voegelin moves to the language of "trust," or "belief," or "faith" as a further modification of the language of "hypothesis."

For example, in one late essay we find him writing, "The trust in the Cosmos and its depth is the source of the premises – be it the generality of human nature or, in our case [in this essay], the reality of the process as moving presence – that we accept as the context of meaning for our concrete engagement in the search for truth." Voegelin is considering the historical process in this essay and toward the end reflects with a philosopher's self-reflectivity on the issues entailed. The fact that the process as a whole is not "experienced by anybody concretely" is a "problem . . . rarely faced with critical awareness, though it is a fundamental problem of philosophy." Still, even if nobody concretely experiences that "All men desire by nature to know" (Aristotle's dictum, of course), nonetheless we accept this because "we share with Aristotle the belief in the premise that a truth concerning the reality of man found by one man concretely does, indeed, apply to every man." But this is not a matter of proof, but of "faith," writes Voegelin, a "faith . . . not

engendered by an additional experience of man's nature, but by the primordial experience of reality as endowed with the constancy and lastingness of structure that we symbolize as the Cosmos."¹⁰

By moving to the language of trust and even faith Voegelin introduces perhaps one of the most contentious aspects of his program, not just to the "non-faithed," so to speak, but even to the "faithed," many of whom think he has excessively diluted faith's "purity." In any case, Voegelin's use of both the language of ontological hypothesis as well as of faith in some ways reminds me of Karl Rahner, whose earlier *Spirit in the World* was steeped in the Kantian language of "transcendental conditions of possibility," but whose later *Hearer of the Word* and subsequent writings emphasized the greater role of the will and love in philosophy. This had much to do with a greater attentiveness to human historicity on Rahner's part, and here he begins to share with Voegelin, then, this attention to history, which is, I believe, the key reason for Voegelin's moves noted above. I might add that Voegelin shares this stress on history with Wolfhart Pannenberg, and somewhat similarly widens the notions of faith and revelation.¹¹ If I

¹⁰ Eric Voegelin, "Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History," in *Published Essays 1966-1985*, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 12, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990; available: Columbia: University of Missouri Press), 132, 133.

¹¹ See Karl Rahner, *Hearer of the Word: Laying a Foundation for a Philosophy of Religion*, trans. Joseph Donceel, ed. Andrew Tallon (New York: Continuum, 1994), 87 ("The concrete way in which we know God is from the start determined by the way we love and value the things that come our way."), and 117 ("Thus we are essentially human in humankind; in space and time we carry out the work of our freedom together with the whole of humankind. We live as historical beings."). Also see *Revelation as*

might offer an all too brief explanation, Voegelin seems to be thinking of “faith” in a larger sense as “fidelity” to the appeal of the partners in the community of being. This makes it roughly equivalent to some uses of the term “belief,” and in the passage just cited Voegelin equivalently uses “faith,” “belief” and “trust.” This fidelity arouses the searching quest (reason), to use another formulation of Voegelin’s, but the searching quest is embedded within a more embracing experience of *fides*. Christian and Jewish faith would be, then, differentiations of this more comprehensive experience of faith.¹²

“The Conspiracy of Faith and Reason”

All of this at least supplies us with some foci for an evaluation of “the” reception of *Israel and Revelation*. It may not be agreeable to all, but it indicates the trajectory of Voegelin and of those of us who find his thought congenial. Incidentally, Voegelin had little use for epigones, and I think he would agree with me that to be an epigone would be to precisely

History, ed. Wolfhart Pannenberg, trans. David Grauskou (London: Macmillan, 1968).

¹² Eric Voegelin, “The Beginning and the Beyond: A Meditation on Truth,” in *What Is History? And Other Late Unpublished Writings*, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 28, ed. Thomas A. Hollweck and Paul Caringella (Baton Rouge State University Press, 1990; available: Columbia: University of Missouri Press), 191-212, esp. 210: “The dichotomies of Faith and Reason, Religion and Philosophy, Theology and Metaphysics can no longer be used as ultimate terms of reference . . .” Cf. Peter J. Opitz, “Politische Wissenschaft als Ordnungswissenschaft: Anmerkungen zum Problem der Normativität im Werke Eric Voegelins,” *Der Staat: Zeitschrift für Staatslehre, Öffentliches Recht und Verfassungsgeschichte* 30 (1991): 349-65.

misunderstand his thought. Knowledge comes only by way of one's own participation within the community of being, not by way of mindlessly repeating Voegelinian *topoi*.

At this point an interlude which can serve us as a transition to the next part of this paper is provoked by a passage in *Israel and Revelation* which is exploring the way in which the prophets had intellectually penetrated a range of issues “to the point at which, under the sensuous concreteness of prophetic language, the ontological problems became clearly visible.” Some of those issues are, for example, faith as the source of intellectual penetration, the tension between divine transcendence and human immanence, “between divinely willed and humanly realized order, the types of existence in faith and defection, the existential appeal and the stubbornness of heart,” etc. In the process of their grappling with these, the prophets, Voegelin claims, were able to create symbols which possess a permanent validity, a “validity due to the conspiracy of faith and reason.”¹³ This phrase – “the conspiracy of faith and reason” – so far as I can tell occurs only this one time in this work, nor I am aware of its occurrence anywhere else in Voegelin's published writings. So I cannot claim that it is a major motif in Voegelin's thought on the basis of the number of times it occurs in his writings. Nonetheless the substance evoked by the phrase can lay claim, I believe, to major importance.

“Conspiracy” in the passage may suggest simply a mutual, to-and-fro spiration or going along with: Faith and reason mutually breathe life into one another. Although Voegelin grants a sort of primacy to faith as the “source” of intellectual

¹³ *IR*, 461, 463.

penetration in this passage, and elsewhere as we have seen. This is a Voegelinian echo of Anselm’s “faith seeking understanding” from the *Proslogion*.¹⁴ Here I believe that Voegelin is alerting his readers to his belief that the ontology of the community of being which he argues is varyingly if often compactly articulated by the revelatory experiences and symbolisms of Israel is not something extraneously added to Israel’s experience by an alien, Hellenistic metaphysics, but reason’s further differentiation of the intrinsic movement of prophetic faith itself. Again, the reception of *Israel and Revelation* is bound up with one’s participating within this faith-reason conspiracy. Not a little of the dispute about Voegelin’s entire oeuvre has to do with more fundamental positions regarding this faith and reason “connection.” An ontology of the community of being would only be alien to the prophetic faith if reason were alien to it, Voegelin is suggesting.

It is true, as we learn from Ellis Sandoz, that Voegelin wrote volume 2 and 3 of *Order and History* before he wrote our volume 1 under consideration here.¹⁵ This would suggest a certain Greek, classical “loading” in his interpretation, for volumes 2 and 3 are concerned with the classical Greek experiences and symbols. The ontology of being certainly has

¹⁴ Anselm, *Proslogion*, prologue (*Monologion and Proslogion: With the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*, trans. and ed. Thomas Williams [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995], 93). See Voegelin, “The Beginning and the Beyond: A Meditation on Truth,” 191-212.

¹⁵ Ellis Sandoz, “Voegelin’s Philosophy of History and Human Affairs: With Particular Attention to *Israel and Revelation* and Its Systematic Importance,” in *Voegelin’s Israel and Revelation: An Interdisciplinary Debate and Anthology* (hereafter abbreviated as “VIR”), ed. William M. Thompson and David L. Morse, Marquette Studies in Theology, No. 19 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2000), 61.

a Greek, classical resonance.¹⁶ The crediting of the Greek philosophers with the greater differentiation of the virtues, only compactly articulated by the prophets, is another case in point. The stress upon the soul as the site of transcendence is another.¹⁷ Still, much of how one evaluates this –Is it extrinsically alien or further unfolding of the inner dynamism, is it eisegesis or exegesis? – depends again upon how one adjudicates the con-spiration between faith and reason. At the same time it is more than curious that *Israel and Revelation* omits any sustained analysis of the contribution of the wisdom literature to Israel’s experience and symbolism, settling for only several brief mentions.¹⁸ Here if anywhere in the Jewish canon one would find a more explicit “ontology” already integrated with the rest of the Hebrew canonical literature, suggesting at least a congeniality between the languages of “being” and of “revelation.” (Voegelin later pays more attention to this matter in *The Ecumenic Age*.¹⁹)

¹⁶ *IR*, 447 (“the prophets’ ontology”).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 439-40, 459.

¹⁸ Already noted by Bernhard W. Anderson, “Politics and the Transcendent: Voegelin’s Philosophical and Theological Exposition of the Old Testament in the Context of the Ancient Near East,” in *VIR*, 28.

¹⁹ Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, esp 99: “A further differentiation of pneumatic consciousness actually did occur in the Jewish-Hellenistic society of the third century B.C. It engendered, in Proverbs 1-9, the remarkable and charming appearance of a Judaic female divinity, of the *hokhmah* or, in the Greek versions, *Sophia*, conventionally translated as Wisdom”; 100-101: “As the meditative practice of the Wisdom-thinker becomes self-reflective, it develops the pneumatic equivalents to the philosophers’ differentiation of noetic consciousness.” Still, because it does not seem to break through to the further, universal implications of wisdom but remains bound to its Judaic form, Voegelin notes, contentiously, that there is a blocking of “experiential analysis”; thus the equivalences “do not make the Wisdom thinker into a philosopher” (101).

A further dimension of the faith and reason conspiracy might well be found in Voegelin's contentious critique of several dimensions of the Israelite experiences and symbolisms. "Conspiracy" here would mean that the reason dimension of faith, as pursued by Voegelin himself, has a way of reverberating back on "faith," so to speak, challenging it to move beyond its compact naiveté and its more dangerous tendencies. But the word "conspiracy" suggests that faith does not know what it is in for as it submits itself to reason's critique; did it know, it might likely decline the opportunity. Examples within *Israel and Revelation* would be the repeated critique of derailments into creeds or doctrines, and especially the charge of metastasis vis-à-vis the prophets and the Deuteronomic Torah. In a certain sense, reason in this instance is launching something of a conspiracy against at least certain doctrinal institutionalizations of the faith as found in "religion," and against the dangerously utopian tendencies which can result in political quietism and even violence, strangely enough.²⁰

A final dimension of this "conspiracy" needing mention is the way in which it is quite capable of launching something of a conspiracy "against" Voegelin's own interpretation as well. After all, he is working from within the to-and-fro of faith and

²⁰ For credal (doctrinal) derailment, see *IR* 94-95, 376-77, for example; for metastasis, 449-84, 489-91, and esp. xiii: "Metastatic faith is one of the great sources of disorder, if not the principal one, in the contemporary world." So far as I can tell, Voegelin never wavered from this charge of metastasis, although he nuanced it by distinguishing between metastasis, apocalyptic, and gnosis (see *In Search of Order*, 47-48). In *IR*, 452-53 n. 6, Voegelin famously notes that he had intended to speak of a "magic component in the prophetic charisma," but "sympathetic resistance" from Nahum N. Glatzer, Gerhard von Rad, and Rudolf Bultmann "forced [him] to resume the analysis." Hence the new term "metastasis."

reason, and the challenge and purification can come to Voegelin as well, from either the side of faith or that of reason. We have already noted earlier his greater refinement of the distinction yet not separation between luminosity and intentionality, with the heightened appreciation for the thing-like, somatic dimension of experience and consciousness entailed in intentionality. Is this an example of reason's conspiring "against" Voegelin's own earlier tendency to be perhaps too concerned with avoiding the subject-object dualisms of philosophy, and their corresponding political manifestations in doctrinal ideologies? It is a "conspiracy" in the sense that as Voegelin followed along the pull of reason's golden cord, so to speak, he was led to hitherto unsuspected territory. How might this have altered his own reception of Israel, were he to have thought it through anew? Would there have been at least a slightly greater, positive appreciation of the institutional embodiments of the spirit, and less of a tendency to always be the hermeneut of suspicion in their presence? Think, for example, of how negatively Voegelin characterizes the Deuteronomic Torah: "[T]he present under God has been perverted into existence in the present under the Torah." Even if this could not "destroy the life of the spirit, it inevitably proved an obstacle to its free unfolding." And this is a problem which fans out into the Pentateuch, into the entire Rabbinic canon, "and it imposed its form, through canonization, also on the Christian literature."²¹ Still, even here he presents a note of balance, writing of the "spiritual treasure which after all was preserved in this magnificent sum of the Sinaitic tradition."²² But still it is the "spiritual" that is stressed, and the somatic carrier of the spirit seems to take not

²¹ *IR*, 364, 367.

²² *Ibid.*, 373.

just a back seat but a beating. It would seem to me that with his further, late thinking through of intentionality, we have at least ampler foundations for a more balanced appreciation of the matter. And this more balanced appreciation also manifests itself already in *Israel and Revelation*, as for example in the treatment of the role of the Decalogue in the formation of the people of Israel.²³ I am only suggesting that the philosophical dimensions of the matter were not as thought through as they would eventually become.

Another example of reason's "cunning" with respect to Voegelin might well be his own thinking through of ontology. *Israel and Revelation* is permeated with the language of "being." And so far as I can tell, Voegelin never ceased using this language. He resolutely remained logocentrically within the millennial western philosophical tradition on this score. At the same time, he grew increasingly critical of the hypostatizing tendencies of traditional ontology, characterizing ontology as a game invented in the seventeenth century of deforming symbols into things and fragmenting the whole "into entities independent of the whole." What might this have meant for any revisiting of *Israel and Revelation*? Would this have introduced something of a greater caution in his use of the language of being with respect to the language of revelation? Probably so, although he also came to the conclusion that one can only think and speak of the reality of non-things in the language of things (or of luminosity in the language of intentionality). The only other option would be the

²³ Ibid., 425-27, esp. 427: "Clearly, the Decalogue is not an accidental collection of 'religious' and 'moral' precepts, but a magnificent construction, with a firm grip on the essentials of human existence in society under God."

second reality of a dream world, in which one forgets one's rootedness within and not beyond the partners in being.²⁴

A last facet of this conspiracy vis-à-vis Voegelin himself would be the challenge coming from the other side, that of faith, in the faith-reason tension. In what sense was Voegelin resistant to the full challenge of Israel's faith? Or was he? And does his thought remain resistant to it? This is certainly a growing concern in the reception of Voegelin, and it extends as well to his relationship vis-à-vis Christianity. Has he accommodated Israel too much to the Greek-classical horizon of thought? Granted that *Israel and Revelation* accords Israel the lion's share in the differentiation of "history," still has this penetrated Voegelin's thinking sufficiently, at least incipiently with that book and more amply as his project developed? This is connected again with the stress upon the "spirit" over the structural-institutional. Further complicating this is Voegelin's famous "break" in his program inaugurated with *The Ecumenic Age*, where even Israel's uniqueness with respect to the differentiation of "history" seems mollified. We will revisit this.

²⁴ Voegelin, *In Search of Order*, 119, 61 ("second reality"). It is interesting that Voegelin even noted hypostatizing tendencies in his "mentor" Plato himself. "The relation between transcendental and immanent being . . . can be symbolized only analogically. Neither Plato nor Aristotle quite penetrated this problem of metaphysical speculation; and an approximately satisfactory formula was only found in the Thomistic *analogia entis*. Plato, indeed, hypostatized transcendental being into a datum as if it were given in world-immanent experience; and he treated absolute being as a genus of which the varieties of immanent being are species. Aristotle rightly criticized this part of Platonic speculation; and in eliminating this confusion he penetrated to the clearness of his own ontology. For this magnificent achievement, however, he paid the price of eliminating the problem of transcendental form along with its speculative misuse" (*Order and History*, vol. 3, *Plato and Aristotle*, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 16, ed. Dante Germino [Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000], 330; see 65, 337).

One cannot help but wonder if the phrase, “the conspiracy of faith and reason,” represents, not only in fact (which it does), but already in Voegelin’s intention, his alternative to the Hegelian *List der Vernunft*, a phrase he explicitly refers to in the preface, characterizing it as the Enlightenment’s replacement for Christian providence.²⁵ Is Voegelin suggesting, in a way, not only a replacement for the Enlightenment’s cunning, but in some respects a replacement, or perhaps better, a new thinking through, not of divine providence surely, but of the way in which that providence has been understood and articulated? If so, Voegelin’s preface becomes an alternative to Hegel’s “preface,” where we encounter Hegel’s “cunning.”

In other words, Voegelin’s program was indeed quite radical in certain respects. *Israel and Revelation* cunningly challenged the political science guild’s *List der Vernunft*. Introducing a major work on political theory and order with Israel’s revelatory experience, not just in a museum-like historical fashion (“This is where we have to begin a ‘history’ of the field...”), but by arguing for its continuing validity and even primacy in some ways in political science was certainly a new kind of cunning. But if the keepers and guardians of “religion” thought this were simply a wholesale validation of their enterprise, they were in for a certain cunning surprise as well. But even Voegelin himself could not know what surprises were in store for him from this new *List des Glaubens und der Vernunft*.

²⁵ *IR*, ix. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, preface, no. 54, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 33.

Observations on “the” Reception

As we begin to think about the “actual” reception of *Israel and Revelation*, now in something like its third generation in North America, it would be good to distinguish between what we might name a more “public” reception, and that coming from the power elite within the Academy. From the perspective of the Academy, it would seem that Voegelin’s thought in general, mediated by a small, somewhat diverse but dedicated group of “carriers,” represents a minority position. To use terms Voegelin employed in another context, the academic establishment’s upper, controlling plane does not evidence much significant influence from Voegelin’s thought. His contribution, one among a number of others on the lower plane of the Academy, still seeks a greater hearing at the table. The “absorptiveness” between the upper and lower plane, in this case, is rather weak.²⁶ In this respect, a “Voegelin perspective,” for example, would be in a position similar to Leo Strauss’s perspective, or to, say, a Christian or Jewish approach to political thought.

On the other hand, we encounter something of an irony in a way when we look at the matter from the perspective of the larger United States society, and perhaps even from that of Canada as well, if Voegelin’s relatively few comments on these societies are accurate. Voegelin said that he accepted the general accuracy of Oswald Spengler’s view that “the revolutions that occurred before 1789 – meaning the English

²⁶ See Eric Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, vol. 4, *Renaissance and Reformation*, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 22, ed. David L. Morse and William M. Thompson (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 131-38, for the notion of absorptiveness and upper and lower planes.

and the American revolutions – were of a conservative type, retaining the cultural structure of Western civilization.” He admitted his prejudice in this matter, since it was the “kindness of America,” as he expressed it, which received him when he fled from the Nazi terrors. Be that as it may, he would likely have regarded the positions of the academic mainstream as not representative of American society as a whole. What he said about the intellectuals in 1973 would likely reflect his view of the Academy’s “upper plane”: “What really has happened is an inconsiderate, and partly illiterate, intellectual movement that inadvertently has polarized itself out of the American social reality and now has to pay the price of defeat for its pragmatic inadvertency.”²⁷ Thus, insofar as Voegelin regarded his own position as a participation within “the cultural structure of Western civilization,” namely, the creative fusion of the Judaeo-Christian and classical streams, one might argue that Voegelin is more representative of the upper plane of North American societies, while the intellectuals are among the lower plane. From Voegelin’s perspective, this little detour into societal sociology is not a case of might making right, or of the masses ganging up on the intellectuals. It would likely be a case of common sense in Voegelin’s technical sense being relatively active and healthy in the United States and Canada.

“The” reception is a matter of the varying ways in which the substance of *Israel and Revelation* has been joined and absorbed. *Israel and Revelation* is the first in the series known as *Order and History*, and this merits further consideration, for I suggest that it will supply us with a frame of reference that is

²⁷ Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 116, for these observations.

not extrinsic to our study, but flows from its inner movement. Readers will recall the book's, indeed the entire series,' opening sentence: "The order of history emerges from the history of order."²⁸ Is it significant that the title is not "History and Order"? We can only surmise, but Voegelin was usually quite careful and deliberate in his choice of the printed word. The actual title places "order" in the position of primacy. This would suggest that he is not simply producing yet another "historical" work in the sense of an archaic study of past curiosities, but he is interested in making a contribution to the diagnosis and therapy of today's struggle for order. The primacy of order is perhaps Voegelin's way of speaking of the primacy of truth, for societal order is a reflection of truth's transparency in the particular society under concern. The truth of order supplies us with the norm in the light of which we may diagnose the fall from order and chart the path leading to therapeutic recovery. Thus, by placing "order" first, Voegelin seems to be signaling his desire to avoid what he later called the "sausage view" of history, whereby one piles up more and more detail into a package, but lacks any coherent penetration of the issues concerned.²⁹

On the other hand, it is to history that we must turn for our comprehension of order, and it is in this light that we can understand the place that our volume occupies in the entire series. Voegelin himself makes this clear in his writings. As he

²⁸ *IR*, preface, ix.

²⁹ Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, 406: "At the lowest level there is the view of the 'present' as a kind of machinery that grinds out an ever lengthening 'past.' I call it the 'sausage view' of history. It induces the frequently heard complaint that the writing of history is breaking down under the burden of steadily accumulating materials. But that would be too much to be hoped for."

thought through the materials and as his own horizon expanded, he recognized that one cannot skip over the place of Israel, nor that of Christianity, in any serious consideration of western political order.³⁰ As one breaks out of the “doctrinal ideas” of much of the then reigning political science and recognizes historical experience as the real source of truth, then the place of *Israel and Revelation* takes on meaning. It seems important to recognize that Voegelin is not particularly led in this direction by what we might call “religious” motives in our usual sense of the term. That is, he is beginning the series as he does because he is convinced that historical experience is the great teacher and source of truth, not because he seeks to shore up the Judaeo-Christian religious institutions. In fact, in *Israel and Revelation*, as is well known, he begins at the beginning, so to speak, because that is what the historical materials demand, and that beginning is not really Israel, but the cosmological civilizations of the Ancient Near East (part one of *Israel and Revelation*). Later he would suggest that even this beginning is too narrow, needing the much greater expansion of perspective made possible by archaeology and prehistoric anthropology.³¹

The *History of Order in the Reception*

We will take Voegelin seriously, then, and begin with a consideration of history as order’s source within the reception. *Israel and Revelation* is the volume announcing Voegelin’s decisive turn to history. As one reads through his, until

³⁰ See Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 78-84.

³¹ See *Conversations with Eric Voegelin*, Thomas More Institute Papers/76, ed. R. Eric O’Connor (Montreal: Thomas More Institute, 1980), 75-154.

recently unpublished, *History of Political Ideas*, it is clear that he is very sensitive to the intensified historical consciousness of “modern” times, especially praising Jean Bodin and Giambattista Vico in this regard. The way he characterizes Vico is similar to his own approach to political problems. Vico holds, he explains, that “man is not an isolated individual who can attain truth through the analysis of his mind in the manner of the Cartesian meditation (as Vico understood it). Man exists in history.” Because of this “the speculation of the philosopher must not use the instrument of reflective meditation, but must start from the unreflected symbols given in history and rise to the speculative penetration of their meaning.”³² We have here a Voegelin who is quite historically conscious, and who greatly evidences a congeniality of spirit with thinkers who are like-minded in this respect. (I should add that Voegelin also practices philosophical meditation, but his form of it does not lead him away from, but into greater participation in, the community of being within society and history. It is not of the Cartesian, isolated self variety.³³) *Israel and Revelation* represents a greater thinking through of this historical dimension of his work as a political philosopher. We typically associate historical consciousness with modernity, and depending upon how one defines modernity, Voegelin would view an historical consciousness as in some ways a modern

³² Eric Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, vol. 6, *Revolution and the New Science*, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 24, ed. Barry Cooper (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 97-98.

³³ See William Petropulos, “The Person as *Imago Dei*: Augustine and Max Scheler in Eric Voegelin’s *Herrschaftslehre* and *Political Religions*,” and William M. Thompson, “Philosophy and Meditation: Notes on Eric Voegelin’s View,” in *The Politics of the Soul: Eric Voegelin on Religious Experience* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 87-114, 115-35.

event too.³⁴ Yet being more doggedly historical than many modern historical thinkers, his openness to the historical materials led him to the deeper source of historical awareness. The modern historical consciousness is but an intensification, in some respects unbalanced, of an historical awareness emerging long ago through existence in the present under God.

What distinguishes *Israel and Revelation* within the series of *Order and History*, and seems to do so even after the “break” announced in the fourth volume (*The Ecumenic Age*), is the way in which it inextricably interrelates the awareness of the world-transcendent God (or the “divine ground,” in the philosopher’s language) with the awareness of history. It is clear that this link is not, for Voegelin, an accidental one, such that an historical consciousness could really emerge apart from a consciousness of the divine ground. One might be able to develop a somewhat differentiated (or compact) historical awareness apart from an awareness of the ground in its transcendent nature. This is what characterized cosmological civilizations, and especially the Greek tradition as represented in a Herodotus or Thucydides. Modernity, on the other hand, at least in its gnostic representatives, tended to seek to sever historical awareness from the awareness of the ground. Down this path led the various God-substitutes of the modern ideologies. In any case, the link between divine ground and historical consciousness as Voegelin presented it, I think, was a shock delivered by our volume to the political science community.

³⁴ See *IR*, xii: “The work could be undertaken in our time . . . because the advance of the historical disciplines in the first half of this century has provided the basis of materials. The enormous enlargement of our historical horizon . . . is so well known a fact that elaboration is superfluous.”

Voegelin’s shorthand explanation is that “historical form [can be] understood as the experience of the present under God.” No awareness of a “present” without an awareness of God, although this awareness can vary enormously in its range. “When the order of the soul and society is oriented toward the will of God, and consequently the actions of the society and its members are experienced as fulfillment or defection, a historical present is created, radiating its form over a past that was not consciously historical in its own present.”³⁵ Obviously peoples and societies have always existed within the flux of historical time, but Voegelin is saying that they have not always known this, or only known it in a compact way. What distinguished Israel was its decisive awareness. Cosmological cyclicism is broken, although absorbed and not simply left behind, by the experience of a new future beyond natural cycles opened up by the call of a world-transcendent God. It was Israel’s destiny to be the carrier of this insight and to struggle with its implications, not always successfully. And Voegelin is positioning his own work within this stream. It is the North Star guiding his magnum opus.

We might speak of a “Copernican Revolution” that is peculiarly Voegelinian, and it would be the decisive turn to history as order’s source. Unlike Descartes or Kant, it is not the turn to the subject per se, although Voegelin will increasingly argue that human consciousness is the “center” of a philosophy of order. (But a “center” is not the whole.) But unlike many in modernity, his turn to history is linked to his openness to the divine ground. The one rises and falls with the other. This is linked with another key insight of Voegelin’s at this time in our volume, namely, that “the leap in being, the

³⁵ Ibid., 130, 128.

experience of divine being as world-transcendent, is inseparable from the understanding of man [sic] as human.”³⁶

I would suggest that it is the peculiar nature of Voegelin’s historical consciousness that has largely determined the broad lines of the reception of his work’s contribution, to this day, in North America. In some ways it renders his project congenial to the modern spirit with its enlarged historical horizon. *Israel and Revelation* is packed with the “modern” language of experience too, but Voegelin avoids the Cartesian and Kantian tendencies toward the isolated subject’s experience. Hence he writes of the broader experience of persons within societies and history at large. This experiential dimension also is congenial to the modern temper.³⁷ Yet, his work has largely been ignored by the Academy, when one moves beyond the circle of dedicated Voegelin students and readers. I would suggest that it is the link to the divine ground that makes many reject his work. This seems to be related to the charge of Hegelianism or quasi-Hegelianism already found in the early reviews.

The followers of Leo Strauss have recently begun to pay some attention to Voegelin’s work, although I am not aware of a sustained analysis of *Israel and Revelation* from their camp. One might have thought that Voegelin’s attention to Israel would be a point of contact with Strauss and his followers, in addition to their shared concern for classical philosophy. But it has not been so. On the one hand, Strauss tends to keep the

³⁶ Ibid., 235.

³⁷ Although the link to the divine ground widens the notion of experience beyond simply sense experience: “. . . experiences which are not sense perceptions” (ibid., 395).

relationship between Athens and Jerusalem rather separate at their root at any rate. At the same time the great hesitation of the Straussians vis-à-vis Voegelin, among others, is the problem of historicism. Just how will Voegelin avoid the trap of historical relativism, if he so thoroughly roots his project in the flux of historical experience, as he seems to do? Perhaps a great part of the difficulty here is again the way in which Voegelin links historical awareness with the divine ground. The Straussians rather seem to think of history more along the lines of secularized modernity, whereas Voegelin thinks of history more along Jewish and Christian lines. Without succumbing to an historical ontologism, Voegelin, I think, largely avoids historicism and relativism through his attunement to the divine ground.³⁸

Israel and Revelation received some of its warmest early reception from thinkers who quite explicitly link themselves with the Judaeo-Christian frame of reference. Here the discussion tended to focus more upon details in the interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures, rather than on the broader framework we have been exploring, which was rather more congenial.³⁹ Here and there some hesitations were voiced with respect to underlying philosophical and theological

³⁸ Voegelin gives one of his more sustained analyses of this in “The Consciousness of the Ground,” in *Anamnesis*, 147-74, esp. 155: “that man is noetically open and therefore can recognize his ground in the *nous*, is not itself an argument or the result of an argument, but rather the premise that alone makes the argument possible.” For the Straussian perspective, see now Susan Orr, *Jerusalem and Athens: Reason and Revelation in the Works of Leo Strauss* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995).

³⁹ For example, Russell Kirk, review of *IR*, *Yale Review* 46 (1957): 466-76, and *The Presence of Grace, and Other Book Reviews by Flannery O'Connor*, ed. Leo J. Zuber and Carter W. Martin (Athens, Georgia: University of Athens Press, 1983), 60-61.

assumptions,⁴⁰ but these would only take on the characteristics of an intellectual caesura after the appearance of *The Ecumenic Age*. Obviously the stress upon history was greeted, in these more traditional circles, as something of a retrieval in a new and deepened form of the distinctiveness of Jewish and Christian revelation (the special revelation of God in historical events as over against the “merely” natural revelation within nature). Voegelin’s blend of philosophy and historical revelation obviously appealed to the Neo-Scholastic, Roman Catholic tradition, while the historical-biblical side of the equation, at least, drew interest from the more Reformation-oriented side, even though this could be accompanied by neutrality or puzzlement with respect to the philosophical side of the equation. In many ways the reception of *Israel and Revelation* in the writings of the esteemed biblical scholar Bernhard W. Anderson reflect this “wavering” between the historical side of the work and the seemingly more alien philosophical side.⁴¹ The world of North American biblical scholarship was influenced, at the time of our book’s appearance, both by the modern historical analysis of Scripture (the “higher criticism”) developed in Europe, as well as by the

⁴⁰ Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, for example, noted a “subjectivism” like Heidegger’s in *IR*’s presuppositions, although he could be quite affirmative as well of many other aspects. See his “*Israel and Revelation*,” *Modern Age* 3 (1959): 182-89, and *The Metaphysics of Love* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1962), 91-92 n. 42.

⁴¹ Bernhard W. Anderson, “Politics and the Transcendent,” 17-46; in his later rethinking he suggests that, following the lead of the New Testament, esp. John’s Gospel, there is a need to consider whether history and ontology belong together: “Revisiting Voegelin’s *Israel and Revelation* after Twenty-Five Years,” in *VIR*, 59. See William M. Thompson, “Exodus and Statecraft: A Postlude,” in *VIR*, 242-74, for a somewhat different but parallel analysis of Voegelin’s views on history and order, which has aided me in these sections of this paper.

Biblical Theology Movement, and both, although for different reasons, would have warmed at least to the historical side of Voegelin's study.⁴²

The prominence of Gerhard von Rad's work within *Israel and Revelation* would reflect the European influence, and Voegelin himself said that he is "closest to . . . von Rad."⁴³ Von Rad treated the biblical text in its final form, not being satisfied with the older source criticism which attempted to reduce matters to hypothetical sources "behind" the text (e.g., J, E, D, P). The meaning unfolding through the revelatory experiences – what Voegelin named the "paradigmatic" dimension – could only emerge through the tradition process itself (hence Voegelin's use of the Uppsala school as well), terminating with the final text. Von Rad's sensitivity to the paradigmatic (or theological) dimension went along with his stress upon credal centers of meaning in Israel (Exodus, Sinai, and Shechem), which Voegelin also appropriated.⁴⁴ At the same time, Voegelin was not simply a credal believer, but a philosopher, and so he goes his own way. There is as well the "pragmatic" dimension of history to consider, and perhaps this is partly why he will refer to the work of W. F. Albright, which gave archaeology much prominence in biblical scholarship, and "who came close to representing an American 'school' of Old Testament interpretation in the 1950s and 1960s."⁴⁵

⁴² See John H. Hayes and Frederick Prussner, *Old Testament Theology: Its History and Development* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 209-18, 219-79.

⁴³ *IR*, 162 n. 20.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁴⁵ Hayes and Prusser, *Old Testament Theology*, 217.

Whether *Israel and Revelation* would have ever been able to receive more of a reception than it did would finally depend upon the reception of its participatory ontology explored in the first part of this essay. Clearly this was not to happen in the Academy. At the same time, *Israel and Revelation* was only the beginning of a new effort on Voegelin's part. It would not be amiss to say he was thinking it through himself as he went along: *solvitur ambulando*. If you will, the connection between the pragmatic and the paradigmatic, and even the dimensions of each of these, were still in process of exploration by Voegelin. Some would find his work congenial because of the paradigmatic dimension; others, because of the pragmatic dimension; others, because of the combination.⁴⁶ But where was it leading (the conspiracy of faith and reason)? We will be able to look at this somewhat more ably in our next section on "order" in Israelite history.

The "break" announced in volume four of *Order and History* from the earlier volumes has complexified the reception of volume one. Some see the break as relativizing as well as amplifying the insights gained there; others, as an indication of

⁴⁶ Besides analyses given by Anderson, the most sustained analysis of *IR* by an American biblical scholar is that by Lynn Clapham, "Voegelin and Hebrew Scripture: *Israel and Revelation* in Retrospect," in *Voegelin and the Theologian: Ten Studies in Interpretation*, Toronto Studies in Theology, vol. 10, ed. John Kirby and William M. Thompson (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1983), 104-37. Clapham finds *IR* basically congenial in its orientation, but he particularly questions *IR*'s tendency to overrate the Egyptian influence over the "son of God" title in Israel (115), particularly in the case of the application of the Oracle of Nathan to David and the imperial psalms; and the failure to treat the prophet Ezekiel (117), who would represent a more "institutional" and social form of prophetism: "Ezekiel is the antithesis of the suffering Jeremiah who cries out the agony of his position between God and a nation about to be crushed. Ezekiel's vision of a holy nation restored to a holy land and a society centered upon the temple containing the *kabod* is the opposite of Deutero-Isaiah's universalism" (117).

a steady move away from Israelite historical revelation toward a more Greek ontology or worse, a modern regression to subjectivism as the stress upon consciousness increases in Voegelin's thought. Voegelin maintained that the principle – “[t]he order of history emerges from the history of order” – was not wrong, but that “the difficulties arose from the side of the materials when the principle was conscientiously applied.”⁴⁷ The key problem was his conviction that “the unilinear construction of history” as the singular contribution of Israelites and Christians, according to which “history [is] a meaningful course of events on a straight line of time,” was in fact a “conventional belief” that could not withstand the scrutiny of the historical materials. Unilinear constructions, which seek to trace history from a “divine-cosmic origin of order to the author's present,” can be found as early as the empires of the third millennium B. C. Voegelin would now name these constructions “historiogenesis.”⁴⁸ Again, true to his own articulation of historical consciousness, Voegelin considers historiogenesis inadequately historically conscious because it seeks prematurely to close the historical process, rather than viewing it as eschatologically open to the Divine Beyond. To be sure, there are advances in consciousness, and so there is a movement forward, but history is not simply moving on a straight line, nor is there ever truly a leaving behind of the cosmos in which humans live. And insofar as the cosmogonic myth is the symbolic expression of our rootedness in the cosmos, Voegelin maintains: “Any attempt to overcome, or to dispose of, the myth is suspect as a magic operation,

⁴⁷ Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, 46.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

motivated by an apocalyptic desire to destroy the cosmos itself.”⁴⁹

What then is Israel’s contribution to historical consciousness? *The Ecumenic Age* argues that substantial doses of historiogenesis inhabit both Israel and Christianity.⁵⁰ It also gives the crowning historical differentiation to Christianity (although this was already to be expected from *Israel and Revelation*), for it argues that “the transfiguring exodus within reality achieves the full consciousness of itself when it becomes historically conscious as the Incarnation of God in Man.”⁵¹ At the same time “different aspects of the one truth of man’s existence under God” emerge through the spiritual irruptions on a global scale (in Persia, India, Hellas, China, Israel), but none has achieved a “fully balanced symbolization of order that would cover the whole area of man’s existence in society and history.”⁵² Israel’s unique contribution seems relativized, and amplified in the sense that it is now varyingly more widely shared. Still, the matter is not fully clarified. As we have indicated, Christianity is credited with bringing “the historicity of existential truth into sharper focus,” and this seems to have to do both with the historicity of the incarnation and also with the sharp differentiation of divine transcendence beyond the cosmos in Christianity.⁵³ What, then, has happened to Israel? Voegelin treats it more tightly in conjunction with Christianity: “The more elaborate articulation of at least

⁴⁹ Ibid., 54.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 51-52, 108-66.

⁵¹ Ibid., 373.

⁵² Ibid., 372.

⁵³ Ibid., 316.

certain aspects of the problem [in terms of shifting from “myth to philosophy as an event in history to be described and analyzed”], then, finds favorable conditions in the Judaeo-Christian environment with its millennial background of differentiating consciousness.” In Israel “the hold of the primary experience of the cosmos has been decisively shaken at an early date by Moses’ experience and symbolization of divine reality . . . [bringing] the deeper stratum of divine reality, its absolute Being, into immediate view.”⁵⁴

As we might well imagine, this shift from unilinearity to a more pluralistic view of the historical field introduced new complexities into the reception, potential or actual, of our book. Again, the turn to history has always been a factor of a somewhat “modern” or “late” modern sort in Voegelin’s work, rendering it somewhat congenial to the modern temper. The move now toward a pluralistic view of history might even seem postmodern. When Voegelin described *The Ecumenic Age* as a work whose studies must now, like history, “move backward and forward and sideways,” in an effort to follow a “movement through a web of meaning with a plurality of nodal points,” one can sense something of a postmodern tone.⁵⁵ Voegelin is, of course, not postmodern in the usual, radically relativistic sense, but his project is quite radically historical, and this is the connection, I suppose. Again, however, the distinguishing feature is the theophanic view of history⁵⁶ in Voegelin’s work, which thus maintains the factor

⁵⁴ Ibid., 56-57.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 106.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 317: “The theophanic events do not occur *in* history; they constitute history together with its meaning.” This is the element of continuity in Voegelin’s view of history between *IR* and *The Ecumenic Age*. “Revelation,” however, is no longer confined to Israel in this later volume,

which fosters a large non-reception within the Academy. At the same time, the two other “camps” of greater receptiveness – the Straussian and the Judaeo-Christian scholars – might well also find themselves increasingly perplexed or alienated. The Straussians would likely see the shift as an indication of an even more pronounced historicism, albeit with the continuing “faith” dimension irrationally maintained.⁵⁷ The traditional Judaeo-Christian scholars increasingly viewed the shift as a movement away from the historical uniqueness of Christianity, which indeed tends to view history as leading to Christ, as well as a movement toward a subjectivistic solipsism through its stress upon consciousness.⁵⁸ Indeed, these are all legitimate questions, and there are some ambiguities within the unfinished project needing address, to be sure.

The *Order* of History in the Reception

One might say that order is to history as truth is to being, in Voegelin’s perspective. The first half of the comparison is

but in varying ways (on the range between compactness and differentiation) it is a dimension of all the epochal differentiations of history (see Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, 300-301), and thus historical consciousness, constituted by the Divine, is as well. “Through the differentiations of consciousness, history becomes visible as the process in which differentiations occur” (Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, 375).

⁵⁷ For the Straussian reception, see the commentary-essays in *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence Between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934-1964*, trans. and ed. Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), part 3, 235-368.

⁵⁸ See the commentary and bibliography in Michael P. Morrissey, *Consciousness and Transcendence: The Theology of Eric Voegelin* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 227-47, 311 n. 12.

Voegelin's special twist; the second half, the more classical-medieval formulation. Being is experienced in history, and as we come to know historical being through participation, being's truth becomes transparent. Order is simply the transparency of truth as articulated in history and society. *Israel and Revelation* spoke of "the order of being of which the order of society is a part," and asserted famously, "Every society is burdened with the task, under its concrete conditions, of creating an order that will endow the fact of its existence with meaning in terms of ends divine and human."⁵⁹ At the time of writing *Israel and Revelation*, Voegelin was convinced – again, because of the historical materials, not because of doctrinal affiliations – that Israel had uniquely among the nations achieved a decisive clarity about those divine and human ends. And that clarity made all the difference in setting the framework for true order and for clarifying the all too common fall from order into disorder as well. We have seen that he somewhat relativized Israel's uniqueness, but he continued to affirm the decisiveness of the clarity it brought onto the historical stage. How have others in North America received this aspect of the matter?

Obviously on Voegelin's view the quality of one's participation in history will largely determine the quality of order one is able to articulate and make socially effective. And so the response to the historical dimension of Voegelin's work will likely "repeat" itself now with respect to the "order" aspect. Although history's logic is not the logic of a syllogism, and there might well be complex and partially irreconcilable positions occurring here and there among the "receivers."

⁵⁹ *IR*, ix.

Since *Order and History* introduces all its volumes from within the perspective of a quaternarian community of being, it will not be alien to our book to organize the reception of order in terms of nature, person, society, and God. “Order” is nothing more than the degree of their transparency in history. Immediately a number of questions suggest themselves. For example, is the introduction, in which we find the quaternarian community of being introduced, itself not adequately integrated into *Israel and Revelation*, as well as the remaining volumes in the complete work? Was Voegelin himself too narrow in his analysis, failing to articulate adequately Israel’s contribution to all the partners in the community of being? Or were the receivers the narrow ones, focusing only upon their areas of interest, and missing the larger backdrop, which might well have provided something of an answer to their misgivings? Or is it the case that, as usual, we have a mixture of these elements at work in the history of the reception?

Or is it the case that history does not move along a simply fully balanced curve, equally differentiating all the partners of the community of being? This might be true of the historical field in general, and true of, say, one of its participants, namely, Voegelin. Certainly *The Ecumenic Age* would be of that mind, but Voegelin was quite aware of this very early on. Already in the preface of our book he noted that one cannot “say that every succeeding order is unequivocally marked as progressive or recessive.” History exhibits “no simple pattern of progress or cycles.” History is more of a “struggle,” to use a favored term of Voegelin’s, and while the struggle is “intelligible” in the sense that “new insights into the truth of order may be achieved in some respects,” still “the very enthusiasm and passion of the advance will cast a shroud of

oblivion over discoveries of the past.”⁶⁰ Voegelin was not excepting himself from this struggle, and we should also not except our receivers from it.

So far as I can tell, we have not really had a serious North American reception of Voegelin’s contribution to nature’s role in order among the partners in the community of being nor of Voegelin’s contribution to “myth” as nature’s symbolic form, outside of the circle of Voegelin scholars.⁶¹ What part one of *Israel and Revelation* on the cosmological symbolism (myth) contributes to the nature of our understanding of mythical symbolism is valuable in its own right, treating the myth as a true and valid form of knowing, which gives expression, albeit compactly, to the “whole,” providing symbols for the “balanced manifold of experiences” and “preserving the balanced order in the soul of believers.”⁶² Our focus, here, however, must be on what difference the attention to myth might make in the quality of the reception. Inasmuch as questions have been raised as to whether Voegelin undervalues the social, indeed institutional, embodiments of life in existence under God in Israel, in favor of a more personal or even individualistic view of the believer, it would seem that the way in which the myth has been absorbed into

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Among Voegelin scholars, esp. helpful is Dante Germino, *Political Philosophy and the Open Society* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 33-40; Glenn Hughes, *Mystery and Myth in the Philosophy of Eric Voegelin* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993); Eugene Webb, *Eric Voegelin: Philosopher of History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), see “myth” in index; and Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution: A Biographical Introduction*, 143-87.

⁶² *IR*, 84; see Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, 118-28, for further refinements by Voegelin, and Germino, *Political Philosophy and the Open Society*, 33-40.

Israel, and the merits of how Voegelin has articulated this, would be quite relevant and helpful on this matter. Voegelin offers a relatively brief but packed section on the question of how the myth was actually absorbed into Israel, indicating that absorption entails a certain element of transformation. Each symbolic form, myth and history, has its organizing center, and it is in its light that transformation should occur. If this transformation is inadequate, of course, problems will develop. Thus, while the compactness of the myth is “broken” in certain respects in Israel, still this greater differentiation is not Israel’s removal from worldly existence. The larger manifold of existence, articulated by myth, remains relevant. “The relation between God and man requires new symbols for its adequate expression . . . [but] the conditions of existence in the world, such as the celestial and vegetational cycles, birth and death, the rhythm of the generations, the work to sustain life, the necessity of governmental organization, remain what they were and do not require new symbolization.” Thus, “the symbolic forms of the cosmological empires and of Israel are not mutually exclusive . . . but parts of a continuum . . . on the scale of compactness and differentiation, in the course of history.”⁶³

Thus, for example, Voegelin argues that, under David, Israel developed an imperial symbolization which was “on principle not different from the forms developed in the neighboring Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations.” And more contentiously he argues that Psalm 110 “shows conclusively how the imperial symbolism of the cosmological civilizations entered Israel by way of the Jebusite succession.” It would perhaps ease the reception of this if it were kept in mind that

⁶³ *IR*, 300, 299; see 298-303.

Voegelin is not suggesting that the imperial symbolism is in all respects unwarranted, given the principles noted above just now. It is not a question of simply leaving the cosmological symbolism behind, but of absorbing it in a manner appropriate to Israel's new center under God. *Israel and Revelation* did write of a break between the two symbolic forms, but it was not a rupture, and it seems important to catch the precise nuances of the break. "The compactness of the cosmological symbolism, to be sure, was broken by the Yahwist experience, but the elaboration of the experience through new symbols never completely penetrated the consequences of the leap in being for either the life of the spirit or the life in the world."⁶⁴

Perhaps it would have been helpful if Voegelin had written of an historically conscious use of myth in Israel, somewhat analogous to Plato's philosopher's use of myth. This would have made it even clearer that Israel was not leaving, nor could it nor should it simply leave, the myth behind, with the myth's attention to all the partners in the community of being. We have already noted the observation that *Israel and Revelation* lacks a sustained treatment of the wisdom literature, in which the natural world is greatly featured. Such a treatment would have promoted an awareness of the continuing role of the cosmological experience in Israel. We have noted that *The Ecumenic Age* somewhat corrected this. In his later work, in fact, Voegelin grew even more insistent on the myth, bluntly stating: "Any attempt to overcome, or to dispose of, the myth is suspect as a magic operation, motivated by an apocalyptic desire to destroy the cosmos itself."⁶⁵ The

⁶⁴ Ibid., 273, 282, 185.

⁶⁵ Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, 54; see 55, for the different types of myth, including Plato's philosopher's myth.

prophetic-apocalyptic strain tends to accent the dynamism into the future and beyond, so to speak. It is focused on the irruption of the transcendent Beyond. Its dark side is metastasis. The tendency of the cosmological strain is this-worldly, mundane. Its dark side is royal idolatry. Israel was struggling between the two, on Voegelin's reading, although he may not have hit the balance just right in every case in his interpretation. In a brilliant but brief section on the "mysteries" belonging to Israel's destiny, he expresses the essence of these concerns rather well: "Each step of further adjustment to the pragmatic conditions of existence had to be measured by the standards of the initial existence as the Chosen People under God. The result was something in the nature of a model experiment in the creation of symbols of mundane existence under the conditions of an already enacted leap in being."⁶⁶

Let us move now to the reception of the manner in which *Israel and Revelation* treats the human person and society, two further partners in the community of being. The two really need to be treated together, and opinions sharply diverge on whether Voegelin has presented an adequately *Hebraic (Old Testament)* view of this. Briefly the discussion centers on the "personal ontology" which Voegelin discovers in the prophets. Is this too Greek in its reading? Already Bernhard W. Anderson had questioned Voegelin's interpretation on this matter, in what might be described as the "first wave" of reception in America, arguing that Israel thought more in terms of the people of God. That is, the Hebraic perspective

⁶⁶ *IR*, 316.

was more social than individual. This criticism has continued and intensified in the reception's second wave.⁶⁷

The introduction had written of the “macroanthropic symbolization” as the new center of order when the break from cosmological symbolism occurs. Now not nature but the human soul attuned to God becomes the source of society's symbols of order. Remembering, as Ellis Sandoz had noted, that Voegelin wrote *Israel and Revelation* after the second and third volumes of *Order and History*, which treat the Greek experiences, it seems likely that Voegelin is influenced by Plato's view of society as the soul writ large (*Republic* 434e⁶⁸) in his interpretation of Israel. Likewise, it certainly seems incontestable that the movement of *Israel and Revelation* is one of intensifying differentiation of the individual person as over against the compact collectivity of the people of Israel. For example, in a complex interlude on the development of the view of the soul in Israel, tucked within a consideration of the witch of Endor story (1 Sam 28:3-25), Voegelin comments that the emphasis upon God's world-transcendence had the effect of retarding consideration of the transcendent destiny of the human soul. Saul's banishing of the ghost-masters is taken as an indication of this: God's transcendence admits of no partners, not even ghosts! There is a “break with the principle of collective responsibility” when Ezekiel (14;18;33) moves toward an ethic of personal responsibility, but there never was

⁶⁷ I am considering the papers written for the fortieth anniversary of *IR* in 1996, most of which were originally delivered at the Eric Voegelin Society annual meeting in conjunction with the American Political Science Association annual convention, as representative of the second wave in the reception. See *VIR* for the papers in their published form. The second wave manifests the concerns of late modernity and postmodernity.

⁶⁸ Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle*, 162-71.

“the development of philosophy,” which would have required that “the soul must have disengaged itself sufficiently from the substance of particular human groups to experience its community with other men as established through the common participation in the divine Nous.”⁶⁹ The reader quite naturally senses an increasingly dramatic climax in the section on the prophets, as Voegelin suggests a movement regarding the nature of the ruler from the institutionalism of Amos and Hosea, to the metastatic utopianism of Isaiah, to the great breakthrough of Jeremiah. “In Jeremiah the human personality had broken the compactness of collective existence and recognized itself as the authoritative source of order in society.” Jeremiah is something of a near-Plato, for he broke through to the personal source of order under God.⁷⁰

As noted, there is the other side of the matter, already signaled by Bernhard W. Anderson. “Voegelin fails to emphasize that Jeremiah’s prophecy concerning “the new covenant” (Jer 31:31-33) portrays a covenant with ‘the whole house of Israel.’” Israel’s view of being is of “a being-in-relationship.” This is why attunement to God demands its manifestation “in the social sphere of man’s life.” Had Voegelin attended to this, his criticism of the monarchy would have been considerably changed, it is being suggested.⁷¹ In his revisiting of *Israel and Revelation* in what we can call the “second wave” of its American reception, Anderson has not changed his mind: “[Voegelin] consistently stands by an ontology that is primarily personal (being of the soul) and only secondarily social (being in community).” He joins with Aaron Mackler,

⁶⁹ *IR*, 240; see 232-42.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 485; see 474-85.

⁷¹ Anderson, “Politics and the Transcendent,” 28, 38, 26, 29.

who refers to Abraham Heschel's alternative interpretation of Israel's prophets. "Instead of dealing with the timeless issues of being and becoming, of matter and form, of definitions and demonstrations, [a student of philosophy] is thrown into orations about widows and orphans, about the corruptions of judges and affairs of the market place." Unlike the great metaphysicians who deal with "the elegant mansions of the mind, the prophets take us to the slums."⁷² Other Americans in the second wave of the reception voice similar concerns. Marie Baird, from a Levinasian ethical and postmodernist perspective, questions Voegelin's privileging of ontology over ethics, although she reads his personalism somewhat positively as at least an inchoate indication of an ethical thrust in Voegelin's interpretation.⁷³ Glenn Tinder, aided by Alexis de Tocqueville's reading of the American experiment, notes an "aristocratic" impulse in Voegelin's reading of Israel. That is, in the battle between freedom and equality, Voegelin unhesitatingly comes down on the side of liberty. Liberty gives room to the individual; equality stresses the collectivity.⁷⁴

Undeniably here we are touching upon some of the most dramatic passages within *Israel and Revelation* as well as

⁷² Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets: An Introduction*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 3; Bernhard W. Anderson, "Revisiting Voegelin's *Israel and Revelation* after Twenty-Five Years," 55, 52; Aaron L. Mackler, "Voegelin's *Israel and Revelation* after Forty Years: A Jewish Perspective," in *VIR*, 112.

⁷³ Marie L. Baird, "The Movement toward Personalism in *Israel and Revelation* and Emmanuel Levinas' Ethics of Responsibility: Toward a Post-Holocaust Spirituality?," in *VIR*, 140-63.

⁷⁴ Glenn Tinder, "The Voegelinian Impulse," in *VIR*, 95-96, 102; cf. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J. P. Mayer (New York: HarperCollins, 1969), part 2, chap. 1, 503-6.

upon some of the equally dramatic responses in the American reception. We might well hearken back to our section on the conspiracy of faith and reason and ask ourselves whether Voegelin is engaged in something of a Greek conspiracy of reason in his evaluation of Israel. This in turn demands a thinking through of the relation between faith and reason. Is this conspiracy a distortion of Israel's faith, or a reading of the deeper dimensions of that faith made possible, in this case, by the greater differentiation of the nous among the Greeks? At the same time, as Voegelin works his way through the materials, does he do enough justice to the faith dimension as differentiated in Israel, in this case, to the Jewish emphasis upon "being-in-relationship" and the formation of a people under God, and not just isolated individuals?

And indeed is it the case that the greater differentiation of the nous occurs among the Greeks? There is, after all, the fascinating passage telling us: "When man is in search of God, as in Hellas, the wisdom gained remains generically human; when God is in search of man, as in Israel, the responsive recipient of revelation becomes historically unique."⁷⁵ This would seem to indicate that not all aspects of the human soul were more clearly differentiated by the Greeks, for the uniquely personal dimension of the soul seems to come to greater clarity in the Hebrew and Christian orbits, where the greater differentiation of existence under a personal God brought with it a corresponding differentiation of the personal thou called into responsiveness by that God.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ *IR*, 496.

⁷⁶ We recall that the differentiation of God and of the human partner complicate each other, according to *IR*, 235: "The leap in being, the experience of divine being as world-transcendent, is inseparable from the

The intensity and even passion of Voegelin shines through as he describes the “transfer of power” from the people to the individual prophet. With Jeremiah the “Chosen People had been replaced by the chosen man.” Equally dramatically: “The sonship of God, moving from the Pharaoh to Israel, and from the people to its Davidic king, has at last reached the Prophet.” If we think of Abram’s emigration from Ur and Moses’ exodus experience as the first two procreative acts of divine order in history, then “Isaiah’s and Jeremiah’s movement away from the concrete Israel begins the anguish of the third procreative act of divine order in history: The Exodus of Israel from itself.” All of this is very stirring and even provocative language. Is there no future for Israel as a people?⁷⁷

This brings us to perhaps the most contentious page of our book.⁷⁸ At the very least it is ambiguous, even as one rereads it time and again. It was already calculated to be contentious upon the original time of publication (1956) in the light of the political climate. Israel, its “new” statehood proclaimed only in 1948, was still fragile and not even a decade old. Furthermore, there were incidents in the Gaza in 1955-56 involving intensive clashes between Israel on the one hand and

understanding of man as human. The personal soul as the sensorium of transcendence must develop parallel with the understanding of a transcendent God.” The “later” Voegelin would see more overlap between the pneumatic and the noetic differentiations, but so far as I can tell the greater differentiation of the personal-historical, both God’s loving and personal “descent” in grace and the human response in kind, occurs in the Jewish and Christian orbits, as we have seen, on Voegelin’s view. However, the noetic as distinct from the personal is the great achievement of the Greeks for Voegelin, it would seem. See *The Ecumenic Age*, for example, 314-17.

⁷⁷ *IR*, 467, 491.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 144.

Egypt, Syria, and Jordan on the other. This page is even more contentious now, in the light of our emphatic sensitivity to the Holocaust and the current conflicts in Israel. Voegelin is writing of the tendency of Israelite leaders to identify the transcendent God with itself as a concrete nation. This was, as he sees it, the great derailment of the monarchy. While there were universalist possibilities elaborated by the prophets, still they were not entirely successful. Voegelin writes, provocatively, of Israel's having "to travel a hard way until it could rejoin the mankind from which it had separated, so that the divine promise to Abraham would be fulfilled." In other words, these Israelites, by thinking of God's people as their nation exclusively, had in effect become a ghetto. How did they become free from this, on Voegelin's account?

Voegelin characterizes Talmudic Judaism, which survives still today, as maintaining the ghetto mentality and thus bringing down upon itself, from the intellectuals of the Roman Empire, "a charge of hatred of mankind." It is perhaps this tendency to ignore or appreciatively approach Talmudic Judaism, to put it mildly, which earns the observation from Jewish theologian Aaron Mackler, in the midst of an appreciative but critical study, that Voegelin "ignores or quickly dismisses differing insights of Judaism, at times with language of mockery and violence."⁷⁹

Voegelin then ambiguously writes of "the other and, indeed, successful branch" of Judaism which was able to "divest itself not only of the territorial aspirations for a Canaan, but also of the ethnic heritage of Judaism." Who was this successful branch? Here lies the ambiguity, as I reread the text. This

⁷⁹ Mackler, "Voegelin's *Israel and Revelation* after Forty Years," 133.

successful branch, he immediately continues, was able “to absorb Hellenistic culture, as well as the proselytizing movement and the apocalyptic fervor, and to merge it with the Law and the Prophets.” Is Voegelin referring to a more universalist branch of Judaism, still continuing today, such as the Reformed, Liberal, and Conservative Jews as we know them in North America? Or does he mean to say that this successful branch of Judaism is really nothing other than Christianity? For he immediately continues: “With the emergence of the Jewish movement that is called Christianity, Jews and Greeks, Syrians and Egyptians, Romans and Africans could fuse in one mankind under God. In Christianity the separation bore its fruit when the sacred line rejoined mankind.” This is one of the texts that causes Bernhard Anderson to write of the “threat of supersessionism” in Voegelin’s view.⁸⁰

Even if Voegelin is suggesting that there are two successful branches of Judaism in his sense of breaking out of a separatist exclusivism and “rejoining mankind,” namely, a Jewish and a Christian branch, still the language is problematic. Why should Israel need to divest itself of territorial aspirations for “a” Canaan? If Voegelin had dropped the article, this would still be problematic, but less so. But with the article he seems to mean that Israel should have no territorial aspirations? Why? And this problem is intensified when he writes that Israel should divest itself of its ethnic culture. Again, why? Perhaps the difficult word here is “divest.” Does it mean “relativize,” in the sense that Israel should not think of its ethnic culture as alone God’s chosen human instrument almost

⁸⁰ Anderson, “Revisiting Voegelin’s *Israel and Revelation* after Twenty-Five Years,” 55.

to the point of ethnic idolatry? Or does it mean “completely leave behind” or even “destroy”? Short of national suicide or extinction, this would be impossible, nor does such a suggestion match up with the observations about culture and ethnicity which Voegelin makes elsewhere.⁸¹

Apart from this difficult page, how more generally does it stand on the relationship between self and society in *Israel and Revelation*? Minimally it is understood, in the American reception we have reviewed, to advocate an aristocratic, personal or individualist view of order, downplaying the social and institutional dimensions, if not negating them completely as far as Israel is concerned. A strange view indeed, if it be correct, for a political theorist. My own view is that we should take our bearings from Voegelin’s view of what he names “the terrible truth.” This comes almost at the end of our book, and it considerably clarifies what he is getting at. This terrible truth is the great teaching that concrete societies and the world-transcendent God cannot be confused with one another. This is a truth not simply for Israel but for all nations. “[T]he

⁸¹ See, for example, Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, 75, 107, 169-70, 271, 279, 372; *In Search of Order*, 46, 50. I know nothing of Voegelin’s views about the newly (re)emerged state of Israel and the volatile political situation, and thus I could not even begin to hazard any observations about how this might factor into an assessment of page 144 of *IR*, if it does at all. Considering Voegelin’s courageous critique of the Nazi racial policies in his various writings at the time of the Third Reich, which forced him to flee the Gestapo and likely arrest or worse, there can be no question whatsoever in my mind of Voegelin’s being accused of Antisemitism in any fair way. Relevant here are his *Race and State* and *The History of the Race Idea: From Ray to Carus*, trans. Ruth Hein, ed. Klaus Vondung; *The Authoritarian State: An Essay on the Problem of the Austrian State*, trans. Ruth Hein, ed. Gilbert Weiss, comm. Erika Weinzierl; and *The Political Religions*, ed. Manfred Henningsen, trans. Virginia Ann Schildhauer; *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vols. 2-5 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000).

existence of a concrete society in a definite form will not resolve the problem of order in history . . . no Chosen People in any form will be the ultimate omphalos of the true order of mankind.” That is, there is inescapably, Voegelin indicates, a “gulf between true order and the order realized concretely by any society, even Israel.”⁸² In his later work he will make the distinction between the “ecumenic” and the “universal,” arguing that the latter is a symbol or eschatological index of universal humankind’s participation in the mystery of reality. The universal in this strict sense does not exist concretely in history anywhere, for it embraces all humans, past, present, and future. Communities with ecumenic aspirations, such as empires and churches, are apt to confuse the ecumenic (the concrete, historical order) with the universal. This is what Israel was struggling with, but it is not simply Israel’s struggle, but that of all of us.⁸³ And the struggle shows no signs of letting up. Borrowing one of Voegelin’s witty ways of putting things, “History, it appears, has a long breath.”⁸⁴

Returning, then, to *Israel and Revelation*, Voegelin seems to be arguing that Israel as a people did not achieve satisfactory clarity about this terrible truth, although the vision of the Suffering Servant seems to have glimpsed the universalist implications of life under the world-transcendent God. Israel’s exodus from itself is Voegelin’s way of articulating this universalist vision of the Servant. However, the very last word of *Israel and Revelation* is “Jesus.” This indicates that we must wait for Christianity before further clarity will be cast upon the terrible truth. Although, to judge by the confusion

⁸² *IR*, 491.

⁸³ Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, 192-93, 376, 387.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 405.

between the ecumenic and the universal in Christian history, such clarity as is forthcoming is met by much darkness as well, on Voegelin's view.⁸⁵

The tension between the monarchy of Israel and the prophets is the chief concrete way in which this tension between the ecumenic and the universal, to use the later categories, works itself out, unsatisfactorily in both cases. As we know, on Voegelin's reading, the monarchy ultimately fails to transform the cosmological experience and symbolism in the light of its new center in the world-transcendent God. Worldly empire and worldly emperor are confused with the world-transcendent God, or at least inadequately distinguished. The "terrible truth" remains blurred. The prophetic critique of the monarchy may be taken as an indication that Voegelin's reading is shared by them. On the other hand, Voegelin thinks the prophets misfire as well, this time in the direction of apoliticism and spiritual enthusiasm. If the prophets are haunted by the pull of the world-transcendent God, they are also somewhat blinded by it, and fail to make their way back to worldly existence. Hence, they do not adequately clarify the shape of Israel as a concrete society in existence under God, but remain "essentially metastatic."⁸⁶ Voegelin, then, does not seem to counsel an individualistic vision of Israel as the proper goal. If so, this would make nonsense of his critique of the

⁸⁵ *IR*, 488-515. The tensions between the temporal and spiritual, state and church, are the concrete way in which this issue of the ecumenic and universal were explored in Christian history, and still are being explored. See *ibid.*, 11.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 484. "The prophets apparently were not only unable to see, but not even interested in finding, a way from the formation of the soul to institutions and customs they could consider compatible with the knowledge and fear of God" (*ibid.*, 446-47).

prophets' metastatic a-politicism. On the other hand, he does not counsel a return to the collectivist cosmological style of society of the Near Eastern empires. This would make nonsense of his critique of the Israelite empire.

My own suggestion is that Voegelin's analysis in *Israel and Revelation* counsels the development of a post-collectivist, personal likemindedness as the basis of a new form of community existence under God. The cosmological form is pre-personal and collectivist. Life under a world-transcendent God calls to personal existence under God as the foundation of a new kind of community. The prophets made some crucial contributions to this effort. As Voegelin notes, their "great achievement" was the "insight the existence under God means love, humility, and righteousness of action rather than legality of conduct."⁸⁷ Jeremiah especially gives expression to this deeper, personal level of awareness in some texts, so Voegelin notes, as we have seen. While this kind of post-collectivist likemindedness is the goal, Voegelin thinks that Israel did not quite achieve it. The key text on this point is apt to be forgotten, for it comes relatively early, about midway through the book. Much of the "pull" of the book's remainder is toward the near but not quite achieved differentiation of personal existence under God. One needs to relink with this text midway to remind oneself that the goal is not individualism but personal likemindedness as the foundation for true community.

Again, what is perhaps controversial about this text, midway, is its Greek tone. Voegelin is clearly interpreting the movement within Israel by means of what he regards as the

⁸⁷ Ibid., 440.

greater clarity of differentiation provided by classical philosophy, at least on this point.⁸⁸ We are back with the conspiracy between faith and reason. “As long as the spiritual life of the soul is so diffuse that its status under God can be experienced only compactly, through the mediation of clans and tribes, the personal love of God cannot become the ordering center of the soul.” This compact experience of the soul was never quite broken in Israel, on Voegelin’s reading, although the prophets make spectacular headway, particularly Jeremiah in his autobiographical texts and the Suffering Servant. Still, “the spirit of God . . . is present with the community and with individuals in their capacity as representatives of the community, but it is not present as the ordering force in the soul of every man, as the *Nous* of the mystic-philosophers or the *Logos* of Christ is present in every member of the Mystical Body, creating by its presence the *homonoia*, the likemindedness of the community.”⁸⁹ This interpretation, by the way, would seem to cohere with Voegelin’s quaternarian philosophy of being as well, in which we are all partners in the community of being. The differentiation of the human partner, so to speak, remained by and large pre-personally compact in Israel, Voegelin seems to be arguing.

⁸⁸ Here Voegelin follows his principle: “Theory is bound by history in the sense of the differentiating experiences” (*The New Science of Politics*, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 5, *Modernity without Restraint*, 152). The greater differentiation of the soul in Hellas provides the standard of analysis in this case.

⁸⁹ *IR*, 240 (the text midway); cf. 485 (on Jeremiah). For Voegelin’s use of the translation of “likemindedness,” first discovered by his reading of Dewey, see *Autobiographical Reflections*, 29-30.

Voegelin may have been rather acutely emphatic on this point of the failure to break out of collectivism because of his own recent experiences with the collectivisms of the radical left (socialists, Marxists) and the radical right (Nazism, Fascism). This is one of those nerve points in Voegelin's work which seems to have inoculated him against confusing institutional structures with true community. He may over-compensate, in the sense that he may not always give those institutional structures (creeds, doctrines, laws, etc.) their due.⁹⁰ But his point seems to be that *homonoia* is something much more profound than structures. Corrupt souls can manipulate structures quite effectively, as the Third Reich unforgettably proved. Voegelin may be thinking not only of the Jewish prophets, but of "other" prophets and martyrs at the time of the Third Reich, when he writes: "There are times, when the divinely willed order is humanly realized nowhere but in the faith of solitary sufferers."⁹¹ Voegelin's so-called aristocratic perspective is directly relevant here. Voegelin is aristocratic in the deep sense that the rule of the virtuous person is the source from which genuine likemindedness might come. The *logos* is the formative source of the virtuous person's soul, and it is the attunement to that *logos* which enables the virtuous person to become in turn a formative source radiating outward, who fosters genuine community-building through appealing to the *logos* present in every person. The way Voegelin, with Buber's help, interprets the role of Moses and the Decalogue is a fine example of this *logos* at work.⁹²

⁹⁰ Voegelin refers to these as "the variegated phenomena of externalization" (*IR*, 440).

⁹¹ *IR*, 465. He might rightly include himself among these.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 418-27.

With this we come to the final and ultimate partner in the community of being, namely, the world-transcendent God. As we have just seen, the logos is the logos of God, the ground present to all and so able to bring about true community to all. Voegelin's argument is that Israel, at least through Moses, brought about decisive clarity on this matter, which is not the same as total clarity. So far as I can tell, he remained firm about Israel's decisiveness in this regard. In the first wave of the American reception, this is likely the key element differentiating the responses. As we noted, Voegelin's turn to history is linked with his view of the divine ground, and for many in the Academy this would likely seem to be an archaic element keeping Voegelin from being truly "historical" in the modern sense.⁹³ Traditional believers were much more receptive in the first wave, but some have grown more doubtful as the fuller work has emerged, especially *The Ecumenic Age*. We have noted this above, as the reader will recall. The difficulty, we are told, is not so much Voegelin's commitment to the divine ground, but his perceived Greek view of it, perhaps exaggerated by an increasing stress upon consciousness in his philosophy of history and politics. Hence as well his tendency to downplay or ignore the church community and its structures, it is said. In other words, does

⁹³ Moses Hadas, in his review of *Order and History*, vols. 1-3, may be representative of this trend: "Reduced to simple terms, Professor Voegelin's 'order' rests upon a hoax, which is justified by attributing divine afflatus to the elite which usurps the power to work it . . . one remembers a remark attributed to a notable patron of the institution which Professor Voegelin serves: 'Sure, we'll have fascism in this country, but of course we'll call it something else.' Leap in being?" Hadas' interpretation of the leap in being: "One assumes, as he is evidently meant to do, that what is meant is conversion, in the sense of surrender to God; what the expression really means is the masterful individual's sudden recognition of his own power, which he must then exercise to impose order on lesser men" (*Journal of the History of Ideas* 19 [1958], 444, 443).

Voegelin overstress divine transcendence (in an almost Neoplatonic fashion) at the expense of the more Hebraic earthy divine immanence and Christian view of the incarnation of God?⁹⁴ We have cited texts above which would seem to stress the distinctiveness of the Jewish-Christian orbit vis-à-vis the Greek orbit. This would seem to be why Voegelin distinguishes between the “pneumatic differentiation” of the first and the “noetic differentiation” of the latter. But clearly an adequate analysis would entail a more complete study of the later writings as a whole.

Observations on the Challenge of *Israel and Revelation* in America

We will conclude with some thoughts about the diagnostic and therapeutic implications for America of *Israel and Revelation*, following Voegelin’s view, expressed in his concluding section of the preface, that the “diagnostic and therapeutic functions are inseparable in philosophy as a form of existence.”⁹⁵ Inasmuch as America and Europe are linked through history and culture, perhaps these thoughts will have some resonance in Europe as well. We will intertwine the two functions, but begin with the diagnostic, again heeding Voegelin’s counsel in the preface, which went on to say that the quest for truth must begin with the struggle against the fall from truth. Our guiding questions, then, might be: What

⁹⁴ John J. Ranieri, “Taming Israel: Voegelin and the Problem of Israelite Order,” in *VIR*, 191-214, provocatively rereads *IR* in the light of Voegelin’s later work and argues that *IR* is itself already excessively Greek in its view of Israel.

⁹⁵ *IR*, xiv.

insight into the fall from truth might *Israel and Revelation* contribute to our search for order in the American context? What are the appropriate therapies it also suggests?

All of the above presents challenges to us today, but I will single out two which seem of special significance just now. The first has to do with the divine ground. I believe Voegelin always maintained that the special role of Israel was to achieve decisive clarity about the divine partner in the community of being. Even after he came to assert more emphatically the revelatory experience of all humans (which was implicit in his view that God is always at least compactly present to human consciousness), he still characterized the Jewish and Christian orbits as that of the pneumatic differentiation par excellence. And it was the vocation of Israel to achieve the decisive clarity, even if not the complete clarity, about this supremely important issue.

The issue is of great importance today in America (I am thinking of the United States, but with appropriate modifications, these observations might well be relevant to Canada as well as to Europe), because our experiment in democracy, part of the Anglo-Saxon political revolution, is linked to an articulate recognition of the divine ground as its foundation. The notion that we have been endowed with unalienable rights by our Creator (the Declaration of Independence) is the testimonial to this historical fact. Historically this was mediated to America through the Christian faiths and through the classical philosophical tradition. That is, our humanity together with its worth is not simply dependent upon changing historical or social whims, but transcends all of these, giving expression in time to the transcendent Divine Beyond. Our transcendent worth participates in the transcendence of God.

The divine logos is the ground sustaining and enabling the dialogue of humanity, and it is that dialogue which makes possible a democratic experiment. The willingness to submit to that logos, and to impose upon oneself the discipline of virtue required to heed its lessons, and the recognition that the destruction of its voice in one is to imply the legitimacy of its destruction in all, such is the very premise of democratic existence. That transcendent logos is the ground of our equality, for we are all equidistant from it, so to speak. To paraphrase a saying of Thomas More's, of which Voegelin was fond, heaven is no further from the person in jail than from the person out of jail.⁹⁶ At the same time, the transcendent logos also grounds our liberty, for its mysterious depth fosters a rich diversity of generous and creative responses.

But can we preserve our equality and our liberty when we remove the transcendent logos? If there is no logos grounding the dialogue of humanity and imposing its obligations upon us all, then what is to be the source of order? Law, perhaps, but a law increasingly thinned down, which restrains not because of its intrinsic majesty, but because of the fear of penal consequences. But such litigiousness demands a strong police force, and then we are increasingly on the way to the loss of our human rights. And a law without majesty is a law which welcomes either social nihilism or vectors of force in competition.⁹⁷ And then, too, the democratic experiment is on the way to its own dissolution. A democracy without its

⁹⁶ Voegelin, *Renaissance and Reformation*, 119.

⁹⁷ Quite helpful in the American context is Ellis Sandoz, *A Government of Laws: Political Theory, Religion, and the American Founding* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), esp. 26-50.

foundation in the logos is like a house whose foundation is loaded with termites.

I have tried to present an argument along Voegelinian lines, to highlight the challenge as I believe both *Israel and Revelation* and Voegelin would understand it, with respect especially to the pneumatic differentiation in the contemporary context of our American democracy. It is the very discovery of that transcendent logos, and particularly its Christian articulation in the teaching that it has entered every human being through Christ, that has slowly enabled the rich democratization of human rights in the West. It is also this realization that has enabled the western democracies to develop structures of religious tolerance, lest the unalienable freedom of any be destroyed. Now today, not so much among the populace as a whole but among many of its educated elite, there is the thought that perhaps the link between our democratic rights and the divine ground is merely historically contingent. Perhaps it was the historical road traveled on the way to our human rights tradition. But now that we have achieved the latter, we can dispense with the former, so many think. But can we?⁹⁸ Here is where the Israelite struggle between the mundane empire and the prophets again becomes relevant. The slow deterioration of the kingdom as it loses its sense of attunement to existence under Yahweh, as expressed in the

⁹⁸ A very eloquent philosophical meditation on this matter can be found in David Walsh, *The Third Millennium: Reflections on Faith and Reason* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999), esp. 98-106. Also relevant is Jürgen Gebhardt, *Americanism: Revolutionary Order and Societal Self-Interpretation in the American Republic*, trans. Ruth Hein (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), esp. 231-301 (chap. 5, “The Crisis of Americanism”).

lamentations of the prophets, is rather relevant in our situation yet, it would seem.

The second challenge worth pondering with special care, as suggested by our inquiry, would be that of metastasis, given the emphasis Voegelin assigned to it at the time of publication. “Metastatic belief is one of the great sources of disorder, if not the principal one, in the contemporary world; and it is a matter of life and death for all of us to understand the phenomenon and to find remedies against it before it destroys us.”⁹⁹ We know that Voegelin continued to refine his understanding of the various spiritual pathologies afflicting the struggle for order, eventually settling especially upon metastasis, apocalyptic, and gnosticism as the major disorders. The metastatic “royal act of faith” that thinks it can “transfigure the pragmatic conditions of warfare into the final victory of the It-reality” remained a political-social constant in Voegelin’s view. Apparently the failure of its realization would be succeeded by the apocalyptic speculation, which imagined an even more catastrophic divine intervention. And should this not materialize, then the conditions were ripe for the varieties of gnostic speculation. In that case, existence was basically a mistake at its core, and the gnostic luminary knew the secret of its overcoming.¹⁰⁰

I agree with Voegelin that the American political tradition is of the more conservative variety, in which modern, liberal developments are joined and balanced by considerable

⁹⁹ *IR*, xiii.

¹⁰⁰ Voegelin, *In Search of Order*, 47-48. See Michael Franz, *Eric Voegelin and the Politics of Spiritual Revolt: The Roots of Modern Ideology* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

elements of classical and Judaeo-Christian substance. I think this is true of Canada as well. The challenge we just addressed – that of severing the human rights tradition from the divine ground – is still greatly balanced by the classical and Judaeo-Christian strains in our tradition, although the educational institutions are greatly influenced by the more modern strain, and much of that is atheistic, antitheistic, or at best religiously neutral. This means that the health of the republic depends upon a vigilant and proactive citizenry formed in the classical and religious virtues, and thus able to integrate and “purify” the best contributions of modernity. The mediating institutions which Tocqueville considered the great strength of America are more than ever needed.

There are metastatic, apocalyptic, and gnostic strains and movements here and there in America, clearly, of the more traditionally religious and of the secularized sorts. We are not exempt from the human condition. There has always been a strong tendency within the Jewish and Christian religions to derail into these pathologies. I agree with Voegelin on this, although this is one of the more contentious aspects of his work. Naturally religious believers do not enjoy owning up to the shadow side of their religious heritages, which they regard with great devotion and concern. Still, one of the greatest arguments in favor of Voegelin’s detection of metastasis and apocalyptic in his sense in the Hebrew Scriptures is the fact that the Rabbis, in fixing the Hebrew canon as a protective device (Voegelin’s term¹⁰¹), greatly excluded the apocalyptic literature, and tucked the metastatic strains of the prophets

¹⁰¹ See Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, for his more “finished” view of doctrine as a protective device, esp. 105, where he says that “precautions of meditative practice” are needed to avoid hypostatizing “the metaleptic symbol that is the word of both god and man”; cf. 326.

within the larger canon which could bring other texts into play which could serve as a cautionary device in the appropriation of the prophets.¹⁰² The New Testament canon serves as a protective device for the metastatic strains within it as well, particularly for the last book of Revelation. One would have expected perhaps greater religious metastasis in America than has been forthcoming, given our rather robust religious traditionalism, with our “Great Awakenings.” But the protective devices of the biblical canons, as well as the larger protective device of the classical and modern traditions have modified such metastasis. But it works both ways – each of the key elements, the religious, the classical, and the modern, challenge and enrich one another, it seems. In other words, the kind of traditionally religious metastasis we seem to have had in America is similar to that found in Hosea, if Voegelin is correct. “As far as one can judge this intricate weave of motives and symbols, the metastatic experience, while it finds odd expressions in the prophets and derails dubiously in later phenomena, is with Hosea not a disturbing but rather a maieutic factor in his effort to bring the Kingdom of God in the souls of men forth from its theopolitical matrix.”¹⁰³

My own view is that for the immediate future the great metastatic-to-gnostic challenge comes, not from the traditionally Judaeo-Christian sector, but from secularized

¹⁰² “. . . what later rabbinic Judaism treats with a considerable measure of reticence and with a clear policy of subordination, is what the messianic Zealots (and in their own way, Jewish Christians) thought most important: the Messiah, the coming of the messianic age, the fighting of the messianic wars, and similar concerns” (Jacob Neusner, *The Way of Torah: An Introduction to Judaism* [North Scituate, Mass.: Duxbury, 1979], 10).

¹⁰³ *IR*, 456. For an overview of the issues, see David L. Morse, “The Problem of Metastasis: Eric Voegelin’s Reading of Isaiah,” in *VIR*, 164-90.

variants. Although should these secularized variants become toxic enough, they might generate equally gnostic, religious fundamentalisms in response. As we may know, *Time Magazine* made Voegelin a celebrated figure in America when it wrote of his thesis about the gnostic nature of modernity, as put forth in *The New Science of Politics*.¹⁰⁴ Given the importance of the liberal tradition in America, Voegelin's gnostic thesis was not calculated to win him celebrity status, nor, so far as I can tell, were the nuances of his position at the time widely understood. After all, "modernity" was not to be identified with "the present." It was a growth within the present.¹⁰⁵ There were other elements at work in the present, such as the classical and Christian traditions, in addition to the gnostic-modern strain. Later Voegelin seemed to modify his thesis even more, when he said: "However one wishes to construct the concept of *modernity*, it will have to cover both the destruction of reality committed by alienated human beings (the ideological thinkers) for the purpose of their own aggrandizement, and the countermovement of philosophers and scholars, which in our time culminates in the splendid advance of the historical sciences, revealing as grotesque the ideological constructions that still dominate the scene."¹⁰⁶ Modernity now is defined more dialectically, but Voegelin's earlier view was set in the public mind, nor can we be sure of

¹⁰⁴ *Time Magazine* 61 (March 9, 1953): 57-60.

¹⁰⁵ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 231.

¹⁰⁶ Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, 103; see 106. For further nuances, see Stephen A. McKnight, "Voegelin's Challenge to Modernity's Claim to Be Scientific and Secular: The Ancient Theology and the Dream of Innerworldly Fulfillment," in *The Politics of the Soul*, ed. Hughes, 185-205; also see Eric Voegelin, *Der Gottesmord: Zur Genese und Gestalt der modernen politischen Gnosis*, Periagoge, ed. and intro. Peter J. Opitz; afw., Thomas Hollweck (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1999).

how Voegelin himself might later have more fully refined this matter. Was this last citation, recorded by Ellis Sandoz from taped interviews, rather more ad hoc and simply a momentary accommodation to public conventions, or was it the prelude to a more “scientific” thinking through of matters? In any case, however one evaluates it, no less a person than the influential philosopher-theologian John Courtney Murray, who himself also achieved notice in *Time Magazine*, seemed to accept some version of Voegelin’s view, when he wrote that he considered the more plausible view that which traced the origins of modernity back to second century gnosticism.¹⁰⁷

Within our current American context, the phenomenon of postmodernism, at least in one of its understandings (and the more common one at that, it seems), would seem to possess an intensively gnostic flavor.¹⁰⁸ I am referring to the linguistic relativism and cultural neohistoricism associated with Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and their followers in the academy here in America. The loss of belief in the self or soul, accompanied by the loss of belief in the reality of the logos (the attack on logocentrism) would seem expressive of a rather strong state of alienation from human community. For “deferring” the reception of the word is a symptom of the refusal to be open to community and intimacy; a new escape into nonvulnerability, it seems. Inasmuch as gnosticism is alienation of a radical kind, this kind of postmodernism is

¹⁰⁷ John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Image Books, 1964), 192; see 30, 131 (for references to Voegelin).

¹⁰⁸ R. V. Young, *At War with the Word: Literary Theory and Liberal Education* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 1999), 14, for an author who sees the relevance of Voegelin’s analysis of gnosticism for postmodernism and neohistoricism.

seriously symptomatic. The nostalgic longing for a more perfect world, beyond “incarnate” language with its messy and hard-to-keep commitments, is there in the continual “deferring” of any firm meaning and the challenge this might bring. “All discourses . . . would then develop in the anonymity of a murmur,” wrote Foucault.¹⁰⁹ We find the dogmatism of gnosis as well: faith in the divine ground is replaced by the visionary who knows the “absolute truth” that no truth is available. If this seems contradictory, it is. It is like Nietzsche’s world beyond good and evil: a strange, new world whose “logic” defies the kind of mundane logic to which the rest of us are subject. Yes, the mundane, non-gnostic self must be de-centered, away from the logos of reality which does the “centering.” “In short, it is a matter of depriving the subject (or its substitute) of its role as originator, and of analyzing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse,” insisted Foucault.¹¹⁰ The gnostic seer is beyond selves and non-selves, just as he or she is beyond good and evil. We might read this as the pretense to transcendence, or as the substitute for the divine ground within the postmodern framework. That is, the postmodern gnostic, like the divine, transcends all categories. From such heights, of course, one can present the posture of indifference: “And behind all these questions [regarding the author], we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an indifference: What difference does it make who is speaking?”¹¹¹ But it is hard not to see,

¹⁰⁹ Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” (trans. Josué V. Harari), in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 119.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 120.

behind this cloak of indifference, the world-alienation of the gnostic soul.

It is difficult to imagine any society, ecclesial, political or otherwise, enduring long on the meager food of a “murmur” emanating from an untraceable source about which one is supremely indifferent. Here one only hears oneself, but one is not sure that one is a “self.” And so we have extreme isolation and deafness. The tribalism and extreme multiculturalism in America today is symptomatic of this, and sad to say the academic leadership all too often feeds it. America is just another construction, fabricated by a power elite, so some argue. Let us have our own, alternative construction, and challenge and deconstruct the power elites, the argument continues. We can try to limit the damage of this kind of civil decay, especially through appeal to “law” in the most positivist sense and through appeal to police power. As John Diggins recently suggested, we can appeal to the legalities of the U.S. Constitution and try to bypass the greater philosophical substance of the Declaration of Independence.¹¹² People tried to do this in Lincoln’s time, too, as a way of defending themselves from the moral stain of slavery. And people try to do it today as well, lest we be bothered by the universal logos endowing us all and so challenging us all with unalienable rights and their consequent responsibilities. All, and not just power blocs of political correctness. But the majesty of the law in the end depends upon its transparency for the logos. When that transparency is lost, then only force remains, or utter chaos and ennui.

¹¹² John Patrick Diggins, *On Hallowed Ground: Abraham Lincoln and the Foundations of American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

In this light, then, the analysis of metastasis found in *Israel and Revelation* takes on continued pertinence. But more pertinent is the positive side of the matter, that is, the partnership in the community of being, and the differentiation of its varied dimensions. For it is the luminosity of this differentiation which gives us the ability to diagnose metastatic-to-gnostic disorders, and to propose constructive alternatives. America can accept the “terrible truth” that it is not and cannot be the Kingdom of God, as long as it lives in the present under God. But this is a recipe of hope, and not of pessimism, inspiring us with the sense, as Abraham Lincoln put it, that we are the Almighty’s “almost chosen people.”¹¹³ Learning the difference between claiming to be the only chosen and the almost chosen is a way of articulating the terrible truth.

¹¹³ Speech at Trenton as President-Elect to the Senate of New Jersey, Feb. 21, 1861, in *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New York: Da Capo Press, 1946), 575; see Elton Trueblood, *Abraham Lincoln: Theologian of American Anguish* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 9.

Abstract

The recent fortieth anniversary of *Israel and Revelation* occasioned a new look at this seminal work by Americans. A study of this American reception may be of some help in the work's reception elsewhere, as it undergoes translation.

This „Occasional Paper's“ first part offers some suggestions about the nature of „reception“ itself, stimulated by Voegelin's thought. How reception reflects the spirituality of the receiver, and its implications, is the focus.

The second part takes up what Voegelin calls the „conspiracy of faith and reason.“ Is this his deliberate alternative to the Hegelian „cunning of reason“? Voegelin argues for the intrinsic connection between faith and reason. This in turn suggests that Voegelin's own reasoned exploration of Israel's faith is not an endeavor alien to Israel.

Part three studies the American reception. Following Voegelin, this section studies the interplay between order and history. It is suggested that *Israel and Revelation* is the first volume in the series *Order and History* because of Voegelin's view that the order of history emerges from the history of order. Appropriately, then, this section first considers the way Voegelin understands “history”, primarily in *Israel and Revelation*, but also in its ongoing refinement in his work, along with the responses this has received in the American context. Part three then surveys the American reception of the suggestions regarding “order.” Social order concretely reflects levels of participation in the community of being (world, humans, society, and God). What level did Israel achieve, on

Voegelin's view, and how has this been received? What modifications did Voegelin later make?

The final part looks at two of many pressing challenges still offered by *Israel and Revelation*. Is the connection between the divine ground and our human rights tradition historically fortuitous or intrinsic? A secularized form of postmodern gnosticism poses another challenge. What Voegelin controversially considered a metastatic current in the prophets is an „historical cousin“ of this more virulent gnosticism, throwing needed light upon this latter.

Zusammenfassung

Anlässlich des kürzlichen 40. Geburtstags von *Israel and Revelation* empfiehlt sich ein neuerlicher Blick auf dieses wegweisende Werk aus amerikanischer Sicht. Eine Studie der amerikanischen Rezeption mag im Vorfeld seiner Übersetzung für die Rezeption des Werkes anderenorts hilfreich sein.

Dieses „Occasional Paper“ macht zunächst einige von Voegelins Denken angeregte Anmerkungen über die Natur der „Rezeption“ selbst. Im Mittelpunkt stehen dabei die Fragen, wie die Rezeption die Spiritualität des Empfängers widerspiegelt und welche Implikationen dies hat.

Im zweiten Teil geht es um das, was Voegelin die „Verschwörung von Glaube und Vernunft“ nennt. Handelt es sich dabei um seine wohl überlegte Alternative zur Hegelschen „List der Vernunft“? Voegelin verweist auf eine innere Verbindung von Glauben und Vernunft. Dies wiederum legt die Vermutung nahe, dass Voegelins eigene durchdachte

Erforschung von Israels Glauben ein Israel fremdes Unternehmen ist.

Der dritte Teil wendet sich der amerikanischen Rezeption zu. Wie Voegelin, so befasst sich dieser Abschnitt mit dem Wechselspiel von Ordnung und Geschichte. Es wird nahegelegt, dass *Israel and Revelation* deshalb der erste Band von *Order and History* darstellt, weil sich nach Voegelins Auffassung die Ordnung der Geschichte in der Geschichte der Ordnung enthüllt. Infolgedessen betrachtet dieser Abschnitt zunächst die Art und Weise, in der Voegelin "Geschichte" versteht, vor allem in *Israel and Revelation*, doch gleichermaßen in der weiteren Verfeinerung in seinem Werk, zusammen mit den Antworten, die es im amerikanischen Kontext empfangen hat. Im Anschluss daran wird die amerikanische Rezeption von "Ordnung" erörtert. Soziale Ordnung reflektiert konkret die Ebenen der Partizipation in der Gemeinschaft des Seins (Welt, Mensch, Gesellschaft, Gott). Welche Ebene hat Israel nach Ansicht Voegelins erreicht? Welche Modifizierungen nahm Voegelin später vor?

Der abschließende Teil behandelt zwei der vielen drängenden Herausforderungen, die *Israel and Revelation* noch immer aufwirft. Ist die Verbindung zwischen dem göttlichen Grund und unserer Menschenrechtstradition historisch zufällig oder besteht ein innerer Zusammenhang? Eine säkularisierte Form des postmodernen Gnostizismus stellt eine andere Herausforderung dar. Was Voegelin polemisch als eine metastatische Strömung in den Propheten betrachtet, ist ein "historischer Verwandter" dieses bösartigen Gnostizismus, der das erhellende Licht auf diesen wirft.

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PERIAGOGE-TEXTE

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Eric Voegelin: Die politischen Religionen

Herausgegeben und mit einem Nachwort von Peter J. Opitz. München, 1993; ²1996

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