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MANFRED HENNINGSEN

ERIC VOEGELIN AND THE GERMAN LEFT[i]

I

The memory of Eric Voegelin as a political philosopher is overshadowed in the USA and Germany by his reputation of having been a proponent of conservatism. In both countries the conservative label sealed his intellectual image. The ideological label is somewhat curious since neither the American nor the German conservatives had any success in recruiting him for their respective causes. Voegelin resisted all attempts at turning him into a conservative ideologue. This resistance did not help him all that much since he avoided the public sphere and communicated his protests mostly in private correspondence. His refusal to enter the public sphere and instead live the theoretical life outside the *polis* contributed immensely to his conservative reputation. A recently published volume of his letters from 1950 to 1984[1] and a book of recollections by friends, colleagues and former students[2], have cleared the air and shown a Voegelin who entered into all kinds of controversies but avoided public exposure of these sometimes harsh conflicts. A short comment on Voegelin's avoidance of the public sphere may be appropriate before discussing his complex relations with conservatives and liberals, to use the American nomenclature for the Left.

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[1] Eric Voegelin, *Selected Correspondence, 1950 – 1984*. Ed. by Thomas Hollweck. Columbia/London 2007 (= *The Collected Works of E.V.*, Vol. 30).

[2] Barry Cooper/Jodi Bruhn, Eds., *Voegelin Recollected*. Columbia/London 2008.

Voegelin never avoided controversy when it came to his publications. His books on race in 1933, on the Austrian authoritarian constitution of 1936 and political religions in 1938 were intellectual interventions in rather controversial and dangerous political situations. Peter J. Opitz has reconstructed an interesting aspect of the second edition of Voegelin's *Die politischen Religionen*.[3] This edition was published in Stockholm in 1939 by Bermann-Fischer after the *Anschluss* of Austria by Nazi Germany in 1938. Voegelin had at that time fled to the USA and written a new preface. This preface responded, among other things, to a critique by Thomas Mann of Voegelin's detached tone of analysis. According to Opitz' reconstruction, Voegelin had sent Mann the book in Princeton and then visited him. He did not appreciate Mann's insistence on getting emotionally charged in a critical analysis of an ideological movement like the Nazis in Germany. Voegelin preferred another route. He used the killing of a German diplomat in Paris by the Polish Jew Herschel Grynspan on November 7th 1938, which provoked the Nazi pogrom of the so-called *Kristallnacht* of November 9th, as a point of departure for articulating his critique of Nazi Germany. In the new preface he developed the argument that the Nazis had excluded the Jews from the community of law and were thereby empowered to act against the Jews according to categories of natural law. The Nazi intent of excluding Jews from the community of law justified acts of resistance including the killing of Nazi officials. In a way, Voegelin anticipated thoughts that Giorgio Agamben would express in his *Homo Sacer* (1995). By politicizing '*homo sacer*' as outsider he turned him into a creative political agent of resistance. Voegelin's friends in exile, including Alfred Schütz who saw a draft of the preface, loved the piece; yet, together with the publisher Gottfried Bermann-Fischer they persuaded Voegelin to delete the reference to the *Kristallnacht*. They were afraid that Voegelin's arguments would be used by the Nazis against political refugees and Voegelin himself.

Voegelin never talked or wrote about this episode. Whether he had forgotten it or simply accepted it as another illustration of the futility

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[3] Eric Voegelin, *Die politischen Religionen*. Ed. and afterword by Peter J. Opitz. Munich 2007, p. 124-132.

of the *vita activa* as a mode of existence remains unclear. In his adopted country he never engaged in any public critique. He provoked students, as stories in *Voegelin Recollected* confirm again and again. His arguments led occasionally to massive student walk-outs from his classes, e.g., at Harvard and Texas. Yet as reactionary as he appeared to them in the 1960s, the decade of social movements in the US, he resented being used by Conservatives for their ideological purposes. Voegelin did not emulate Socrates' role as a questioner in the public sphere. And, despite his limitless admiration for Plato, he did not travel to Syracuse either in order to reeducate a tyrant. His abstention from *praxis* was total. He preferred the *bios theoretikos* and lived it for most of his life, especially during his final years from 1969 to 1985 in Stanford, California.

As much as Voegelin was revered by conservative intellectuals in the USA and, through their direct and indirect sponsorship, received generous financial funding for his personal research and projects connected with his work in Munich and Stanford, he refused becoming identified with conservative causes. In a letter to a conservative political scientist who had referred to him in an essay in 1978 as a Conservative, Voegelin wrote: "… I have not spent my life and done my work, in order to amuse and comfort American Conservatives. It is, of course, quite legitimate to write an essay about the reception my work has found among Conservatives, but I am afraid a serious treatment of this subject would have to become a satire on the Conservatives." He indicated that the author had assembled the material for such treatment. "Why you have left the satire incomplete, I am sure, you will know best yourself. But as a basis for satirical purposes your study merits high praise, and I shall use it perhaps sometime."[4]

The sarcasm of Voegelin's response was fed by his social acquaintance with some prominent members of the conservative camp. In a letter from the University of Notre Dame, where he was teaching for a semester in 1961, he wrote Robert Heilman: "… I got a good look at the crowd in *Modern Age*, the conservative periodical. One thing they have in common with liberals: a profound respect for

[4] Letter to John East, July 3 1978, in: *Selected Correspondence*, p. 841.

the sacred right not to know too much. I have a feeling, perhaps wrongly induced by environmental accidents, of an intellectual flabbiness that cannot end well. The feeling is especially strong here, because people are strongly anti-Communist without being able to meet the intellectual challenge of Communism with anything better."[5]

His contempt for the closed mind set of Conservatives runs like a red thread through the recollections of Voegelin's friends, colleagues and students that Barry Cooper and Jodi Bruhn have presented in 2008 as their anamnetic project, *Voegelin Recollected*. He became rather agitated when people used his name or work for political purposes. He wrote Gerhart Niemeyer, who taught at the University of Notre Dame, an angry letter in October 1964. Voegelin had found out that Niemeyer, who was known for his anti-Communist and conservative commitments, had dropped Voegelin's name in the context of the Barry Goldwater campaign for president for which he worked. Voegelin stated: "Any move undertaken by whomever, apt to associate my work as a scholar with any political party, group or movement whatsoever, but especially with Goldwater, conservatism or rightist groups, is made not only without my permission or tacit consent, but against my declared intention. I consider any such attempt at association as an attack on the intellectual integrity of my work."[6] I personally experienced in 1970 the lack of understanding between Voegelin and one of the most prominent representatives of American Conservatism, Russell Kirk. They were sitting across from each other at Voegelin's house in Stanford and had nothing to say to each other.[7]

The lack of understanding between Voegelin and Conservatives was even worse in Germany. In 1958 when he accepted a professorship for political science at the University of Munich he returned as an American citizen to his native country. This identity feature of his life in Germany was missed by most people. Even his students did not pay much attention to his repeated references to his American

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[5] *Selected Correspondence*, p. 428.

[6] *Selected Correspondence*, p. 472.

[7] See my account in *Voegelin Recollected*, p. 42.

citizenship; they considered it a temporary condition that would be overcome in time. For Voegelin, however, the American citizenship had provided him in 1944 a security that anchored his social existence until his death in Stanford in 1985. Voegelin's move to Munich was not a homecoming. It was also an academic career decision that gave him the opportunity to confront the relics of the Nazi empire which had forced him and his mostly Jewish friends in Vienna into exile in 1938. His famous lectures in the summer term 1964 on "*Hitler und die Deutschen*" were his reckoning with historical Germany and the surviving remnants of that past.[8] There was no love lost between Voegelin and German Conservatives. They reminded him of the people that had destroyed Europe or done nothing to stop that destruction. This critical understanding of Voegelin's attitude towards the historical and contemporary Germany was not seen by most members of the German Left.

The German situation became somewhat complicated by the fact that he was hired by the Bavarian Ministry of Culture to launch political science at the University of Munich, to occupy the first chair and to start an Institute for Political Science. Munich was a Catholic city in an even more Catholic state where the terms Catholic and Conservative were exchangeable attributes. Whether the Ministry of Culture had known that Voegelin was not a Catholic but a Lutheran is less important than his anti-doctrinal attitude towards Christian religion which was equally directed against the Catholic and the Lutheran Churches. This anti-doctrinal attitude had become reinforced by his experiences with the collaboration of the Christian Churches with the Nazi regime. In his Hitler-lectures of 1964, he spent more than one lecture on the spiritual corruption of institutional Christianity during the Nazi period. Although these lectures were not published while he was in Munich, their content became known to the Cultural Ministry and the Archdiocese.[9] For the conservative political establishment Voegelin became a *persona non grata*.

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[8] Eric Voegelin, *Hitler und die Deutschen*. Ed. and introduction by Manfred Henningsen. Munich 2006, p. 9-38.

[9] Ibid., p. 16.

The Left did not even begin to recognize the importance of Voegelin's lectures on Hitler when he became publicly attacked by a prominent neo-Nazi newspaper.[10] He had committed intellectual suicide in their eyes when he called Marx an "intellectual swindler" in his Inaugural Lecture in the fall of 1958. This characterization had nothing to do with Marx's critique of political economy which Voegelin frequently praised, but instead was aimed at his philosophy of religion or the general prohibition of questioning of experiences of transcendence. The Left kept their distance.

Voegelin's connection with the German Left could have been built on his personal contact with Max Horkheimer, who next to Theodor Adorno, was the leading figure of the Frankfurt School. Horkheimer had invited Voegelin in the winter term 1956/57 to lecture on themes from the first volume of *Order and History*, namely *Israel and Revelation*. Voegelin gave the lectures and returned to Baton Rouge in Louisiana. After accepting the Munich offer one year later, he never reestablished his Frankfurt connection during the following 11 years of his Munich tenure. The lack of interest that was shown toward his ongoing work on comparative civilizations, their meaning narratives and patterns of symbolization which he experienced in Frankfurt, as he told me in Stanford, may have prevented him from reaching out. But there were other reasons that may have played a role in this peculiar lack of contact between Voegelin's Munich *Institut* and the Frankfurt School in the crucial period of the 1960s. Yet, there was one intellectual link between these two centers of creative critical thinking in West Germany who tried very hard to make connections, namely Jacob Taubes.

Taubes had been in regular contact with Voegelin since 1952. Knowing his book, *Abendländische Eschatologie* (1947), Voegelin considered Taubes a creative scholar in the area of comparative religion and one of the few truly appreciative readers of his own work. He actually asked Taubes in 1956 to scan the galleys for *Israel and Revelation* for Hebrew misspellings.[11] When Taubes became in 1961 a visiting professor, and in 1965 a tenured professor for

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[10] Ibid., p. 17.

[11] *Selected Correspondence*, p. 281.

Judaistik und Hermeneutik at the Free University in West Berlin, he began regularly visiting Voegelin's *Institut* in Munich, giving presentations and lectures which were tremendously appreciated by Voegelin's students. Voegelin even considered the possibility of bringing Taubes to Munich, knowing quite well that he would get nowhere with this proposal in the conservative climate of Bavarian politics. Taubes had become, together with his philosopher wife Margarita von Brentano, one of the few university professors who publicly supported the student radicals, including the initial activities of the Baader-Meinhof group. Voegelin was aware of Taubes' public role but did not stop meeting him despite his own problems with the student Left that culminated in May 1968.[12] In 1967 he had accepted Taubes' proposal for a discussion with Hans Blumenberg and Alexandre Kojève. He wrote to Taubes in January 1967: "I was very pleased by your suggestion of a meeting between you, Blumenberg and myself, to which possibly Kojève should be added. This could indeed become a very fruitful discussion. As regards the place of action, I would have the same considerations as you do. Can such a discussion be successfully conducted in this milieu of Red Guards, or would it not be better to organize the thing here in Munich, if colleagues and students are supposed to participate? Naturally, I would be just as pleased to come to Berlin…"[13] Though this meeting failed to materialize because Blumenberg had fallen into a "state of depression" after the publication of the book, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (1966), about which the discussion was planned, it is important to mention it for reasons which pertain to a peculiar attack on Voegelin by Richard Faber, a student of Taubes. This attack may reveal strained relations between Voegelin and the Left that also go to the core of the non-existing contact between Voegelin and Habermas.

Richard Faber published in 1984 the book *Der Prometheus-Komplex* which is dedicated, as the subtitle suggests, to the critique of the "*Politotheologie*" of Eric Voegelin and Hans Blumenberg. Faber's term "*Politotheologie*" is a neologism that was coined for the

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[12] See my account in: *Voegelin Recollected*, p. 88f.

[13] *Selected Correspondence*, p. 519.

purpose of denouncing Voegelin's political philosophy as political theology. In the laicistic climate of Germany where the book was published, the charge of being engaged in political theology was meant as an intellectual character assassination. Voegelin as political theologian was even less acceptable than Voegelin as political philosopher. The character assassination of Voegelin included, however, an attack on Blumenberg whose book was understood by the author and the critics who reviewed it as a refutation of Voegelin's thesis about modernity as being defined by 'Gnosticism'. Blumenberg considered, contrary to Voegelin, that modernity was the overcoming of the essence of 'Gnosticism', not its affirmation. Why Faber did not recognize the major difference between Voegelin and Blumenberg and, then, connecting both with the early works of Carl Schmitt on *Politische Theologie* and *Politische Romantik*, remains obscure, unless one recognizes Faber's general phobia against experiences of transcendence.

Faber's attack on Voegelin was primarily motivated by his insistence on recognizing genuine experiences of transcendence as having been constitutive for all major spiritual movements. Still, Voegelin's occasional anti-Communist statements also unnerved the critic. Faber went into intellectual rage and finished a contribution on "*Gnosis und Politik*" that Taubes had included in a three-volume publication on *Religionstheorie und Politische Theologie* (1983-87) with an outburst against Voegelin's, as he called it, McCarthy-like cold warrior obsession. Anything that he could find about Voegelin's anti-Communism was put together in an indictment reminiscent of the figure of the Grand Inquisitor. Faber actually used this comparison in his diatribe.[14]

Voegelin's anti-Communism that infuriated Faber in 1984 was born much earlier and became articulated in the essay on "*Gnostische Politik*" that was published in 1952 by the German journal *Merkur*. This essay, which Faber uses as a basis for his attack, had intrigued Albert Camus. Camus had become an outcast of the Left in France a

[14] Richard Faber, Eric Voegelin, Gnosis-Verdacht als politologisches Strategem, in: *Gnosis und Politik*. Ed. by Jacob Taubes. Munich 1984, p. 248.

year earlier when he published *L'homme révolté*. Jacob Taubes informed Voegelin, in his introductory letter to Voegelin on November 24th 1952, that Camus had requested from Taubes' wife that she leave the issue of *Merkur* with him.[15] A few months later, Voegelin wrote a long letter to Taubes with references to all kinds of people he should meet. In this letter he told Taubes why he was interested in *Gnosticism*. Taubes had suggested people become victims of "metaphysical blindness" as the result of fate. Voegelin disagreed and emphasized agency. He admitted that he had not reached total "clarity in this question" but intimated a "tendency". He then wrote: "The second motive, about which I feel emotionally quite strongly, comes from the causal interrelationship that I believe I see between gnostic eschatology and the brutal facts of concentration camps. The fathers care strongly, spiritual agnostics with a still very respectable ethos and manly pride for the thrones of kings, the sons are washed-out liberals, and the grandchildren are National Socialists or Communists. In the visage of every positivistic professor or liberal preacher I see the visage of an SS murderer shining through which he brings into being. Very personal and quite general problems flow together for me in these visions, in which faces become transparent and I see their victims dying. Very personal: because I feel myself to be one of the potential victims also – and I am apparently allergic to individuals in whom I see my potential murderer."[16] While Taubes knew about the roots of Voegelin's anti-Communism, Faber did not. Why Taubes did not redirect his student's one-track mind is a different story.

My own anecdotal evidence regarding Taubes' unpredictable behavior goes back to a dinner invitation in late May 1968 that he and his wife Margarita von Brentano extended to me during one of their frequent visits to Munich. Taubes wanted to introduce me to the editor of *Merkur*, Hans Paeschke. He asked me, though, to not mention Voegelin's name or to respond to any of his personal comments on Voegelin. Not knowing what to expect, I was surprised when Paeschke complained during the dinner at the *Hotel Vier-*

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[15] Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution, Box 37, File 101.

[16] *Selected Correspondence*, p. 162.

Jahreszeiten bitterly about Voegelin's "terrible" essay on "*Gnostische Politik*". Taubes warned me with his eyes and went on to another subject. In 1968, I thought Paeschke was criticizing Voegelin for the content of the essay but was surprised many years later when I was looking through the Voegelin Papers at the Hoover Institution in Stanford that he had tried many times to get a contribution from Voegelin for *Merkur*. Voegelin got tired of the regular requests and finally recommended me as an author (I published regularly in *Merkur* from 1976 to 2002 when the editors decided that I had become too critical of the USA and rejected a manuscript).

Taubes' place in the university landscape of West Berlin in the late 1960s and 1970s has been vividly portrayed by Peter Glotz in his memoirs. Glotz was part of the city government of West Berlin and in charge of culture and higher education. Glotz was a Social Democratic politician – at one point the secretary general of the SPD – and he was an intellectual who wanted to reinvigorate the life of the spirit at West German universities. He had admired Voegelin's teaching and impact on students while he was a student in Munich and actually visited him, according to Voegelin's records, on March 27th 1978 in Stanford (in his memoirs Glotz confused it with Texas) to get advice from him about the reorganization of German universities. Glotz calls Taubes brilliant and "totally unpredictable". He was overflowing with ideas and constantly handing him notes with the message "Please, think of Blumenberg." His left radicalism had become replaced by his admiration for Carl Schmitt whom he regularly visited in Plettenberg until his death in 1985. Glotz had been initially, as he writes, suspicious of Taubes but began to see him as one of the few creative minds at the Free University.[17] In a way, his judgment of Taubes confirms Voegelin's judgment. He couldn't care less about Taubes' reputation and even the things he may have been saying about him behind his back, he considered his intellectual curiosity inspiring. This attitude towards Taubes reflects Voegelin's rather complex reading of the Left, especially his relationship with the Frankfurt School.

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[17] Peter Glotz, *Von Heimat zu Heimat. Erinnerungen eines Grenzgängers*. Berlin 2005, p. 166f.

II

For many reasons it is instructive to discuss the relationship between Voegelin and members of the Frankfurt School. Voegelin (1901-1985), Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), Leo Loewenthal (1900-1995), to name only a few, were age-mates, grew up in the same historical configuration, fled Nazi Germany, went into exile in the USA and returned permanently or regularly to their native Germany. Certainly, almost all the members of the original Frankfurt School belonged to the German Jewish bourgeoisie whereas Voegelin came from a Lutheran civil servant background. Yet most of his friends in Vienna came from a similar Austrian bourgeois Jewish background as did the members of the Frankfurt group, though they did not become, like their Frankfurt colleagues, attracted to Marxism.

The contacts between Voegelin and the leading members of the Frankfurt School, including Habermas, were limited, apart from teaching in Frankfurt during the winter term of 1956/57 on ancient Israel. Considering the Marxist image of the Frankfurt School, then and now, and Voegelin's status as an anti-communist intellectual after a *Time*-magazine “cover” story on his ideas appeared in 1953, this invitation by Horkheimer underlined both men's disregard for public reputation. Whatever their philosophical and political differences may have been, they knew of each other's solid anti-Nazi credentials. In addition, Horkheimer's *Zeitschrift für Sozial-forschung*, the Institute's famous journal on social research from 1932 (Leipzig) to 1941 (Paris), had reviewed one of Voegelin's books on race, *Die Rassenidee in der Geistesgeschichte* (Berlin 1933) and come to the conclusion: "Voegelin presents on only 160 pages an abundance of clear thoughts and honest research -- contrary to the usual literature in this area."[18] This positive evaluation of Voegelin's book on race ideas (which, by the way, was shared by Hannah Arendt who called it in her *Origins of Totalitarianism* the

[18] *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Vol. 5, 1936 (Paris 1937); reprint, Munich 1980, Vol. 5, p. 153.

"best historical account of race thinking"[19]) is reiterated by a younger associate of the Frankfurt School, Detlev Clausen, in a book on racism.[20] Though Voegelin and the Frankfurt School members kept their distance from each other, they were aware of the other's activities.

After he had settled at the Hoover Institution on the Stanford Campus in early 1969, Voegelin was asked by the Director of the Hoover Institution, Glenn W. Campbell, who was also a member of the University of California Board of Regents, to comment on Herbert Marcuse's then controversial "proposed post-retirement appointment and merit increase" at the University of California at San Diego. He sent an informal memorandum which he concluded this way: "To put my own position bluntly: Though I have never met Herbert Marcuse and though I know through friends that he is liable to have an apoplectic fit when my name is mentioned in his presence I can imagine we would get along quite well in conversation, because we both know what the problems are and can talk about them even if we disagree on their resolution. With most of the persons employed as faculty in the field of Social Science I find it impossible to talk at all, because they are illiterate."[21] This impression of intellectual illiteracy was for Voegelin the defining experience in all his social relationships, including those with leading American conservative intellectuals for whom he did not show, as I have indicated, much interest or respect.

Against the background of the claims of American Conservatives about Voegelin's intellectual identity, it is rather intriguing to explore commonalities between Voegelin and the Frankfurt School, even though the generational factor plays an important role. Whatever themes and patterns Voegelin and the older members of the Frankfurt School shared and whatever common experiences of exile may have colored their views, Habermas belonged to a different generation. His treatment of Voegelin in his work -- though

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[19] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York 1979, p. 158.

[20] Detlev Clausen, *Was heist Rasssimus?* Darmstadt 1994, p. 42.

[21] Letter to Glenn W. Campbell, May 27 1969; in: *Selected Correspondence*, p. 601-603.

their class and culture background was similar -- indicates that he was not interested. He refers to him in historical arguments in two chapters of his *Theorie und Praxis* (1963) and in the review volume on *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften* (1967). The references are of no relevance to any of Habermas' major arguments; in the epistemological review volume Voegelin was actually mentioned only as a reference to Alfred Schütz.[22] Yet Habermas was treated worse by Voegelin who did not even mention him. This intellectual disinterest in each other's work extended in Voegelin's case to the older members of the School as well. As much as this peculiar behavior of scholars illuminates the splendid, if not arrogant, isolation among German Mandarins, the similarities in the understanding of the modern world between Voegelin on the one hand and Horkheimer and Adorno on the other call for closer scrutiny. The obvious ambivalence, if not hostility, they demonstrated toward modernity was not supported by Habermas. Yet the founders of the Frankfurt School, Habermas and Voegelin would have unequivocally supported the critique of postmodernism expressed by Leo Loewenthal when he received the Adorno Award in 1989 in Frankfurt and attacked postmodernism for its "blindness" and the "denial of reality" in a "refined, often scurrilous semantic".[23]

This united front against postmodernism as the endorsement of relativism -- Loewenthal called postmodernism the "triumph of instrumental relativism"[24] -- did not exist versus modernity. For Habermas the "rational content of cultural modernity" was not captured in the major work of Horkheimer and Adorno, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. He wrote critically: “I am thinking here of the specific theoretical dynamic that continually pushes the sciences, *beyond* merely engendering technically useful knowledge; I am referring, further, to the universalistic foundations of law and morality that have *also* been incorporated . . . into the institutions of

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[22] Jürgen Habermas, *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften*, in: *Philosophische Rundschau* (1967), Beiheft 5, p. 115.

[23] Leo Loewenthal, *Untergang der Dämonologie. Studien über Judentum, Antisemitismus und faschistischen Geist*. Leipzig 1990, p. 7.

[24] Ibid., p. 8.

constitutional government, into the forms of democratic will formation, and into individualist patterns of identity formation; I have in mind, finally, the productivity and explosive power of basic aesthetic experiences . . .”[25] With this catalogue of achievements Habermas reaffirms an understanding of the European Enlightenment with which Horkheimer and Adorno could not identify anymore. The title of their famous book, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, registered their disillusionment. The book, which was written during World War II in Los Angeles, was among other things, the most radical indictment of the self-destruction of Enlightenment. They wrote 1944 in the preface: “If consideration of the destructive aspect of progress is left to its enemies, blindly pragmatized thought loses its transcending quality and its relation to truth. In the enigmatic readiness of the technologically educated masses to fall under the sway of any despotism, in its self-destructive affinity to popular paranoia, and in all uncomprehended absurdity, the weakness of the modern theoretical faculty is apparent.”[26]

For Horkheimer and Adorno the failure of the emancipatory promise of the Enlightenment was obviously manifest in Stalin's Russia, Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany. Yet the references in the quoted passage from the 1944 preface were directed to their host society, the USA. If the last refuge of Western civilization, a civilization that started its liberating career in Homeric Greece, looked like L.A. and the culture industry of Hollywood, then "thought truly loses its transcending quality and its relation to truth." The "eclipse of reason", the title of Horkheimer's devastating and totally neglected critique of positivism published in 1947 in New York, would be the appropriate characterization of the terminal stage of history.

Voegelin made during a trip in the summer of 1953 to a summer school engagement at the University of Southern California critical observations that could be confused with any Frankfurt text from the

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[25] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. Twelve Lectures*. Cambridge, Mass. 1987, p. 113.

[26] Max Horkheimer/Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. New York 1994, p. XIII.

same time period. He wrote in a letter: "Hollywood and Beverly Hills are atrocious. Miles and miles of luxurious villas built with the money earned destroying culture. You can see how a world goes to ruin – an apocalyptic spectacle that can only be compared to Auschwitz."[27] Two days later he wrote to his friend Robert Heilman about this "apocalyptic spectacle" and became even more direct though he replaced Auschwitz with Buchenwald: "There you can really see the end of our world – miles of expensive pig-sties for the swine who destroy our civilization; one can compare the horror only to such places as Buchenwald."[28] These surprising comments about American culture were not an aberration caused by some travel-related circumstances or his less luxurious living conditions in Baton Rouge. Voegelin had already in 1945, under the impact of the end of World War II, expressed thoughts in his *History of Political Ideas* (which has been posthumously published in the *Collected Works*) that could have been formulated by Horkheimer and Adorno in the *Dialectic of Enlighenment*. Voegelin wrote: "… we see the potentialities of science unfold in a realm of magnificent technical achievement. This technical realm is becoming increasingly phenomenal and acquiring obsessional characteristics insofar as it attempts man to translate into reality what can be done by technical means without regards for the consequences in the substantial order. The realm of technical means becomes a legitimating order in the same sense in which the theoretical order of biology or economics has become a standard: What can be done should be done." This leads Voegelin to formulations that explain more than anything else why attempts at recruiting him for ideological camps of any persuasion amount to nothing: "As a consequence we must observe the transplantation and destruction of whole populations, the machine-gunning of fleeing civilians, terror-bombing and pulverization of towns, and the horrors of extermination camps. The tools cease to be simple instruments of execution in the service of substantial purposes and gain a momentum of their own that bend the purposes to the technical possibilities. If the realm of the purposes itself is drying up in substance, as its does in our time, and

[27] *Selected Correspondence*, p. 170.

[28] Ibid., p. 172.

biological, economic, and psychological obsessions move into the place of purposes, the combination of the various phenomenalisms threatens to extinguish the last vestiges of substance. The National Socialist exterminations are the starkest manifestation of the victory of phenomenal obsessions over spiritual order." He then concretizes his observations about the eclipse of vision that anticipates arguments Hannah Arendt would make in 1963 about the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem that she observed in 1961. Voegelin wrote: "There is a most intimate connection between the comic strip and the concentration camp. The man who runs away from an invasion from Mars because the comic strip and the broadcast have decomposed his personality and the SS man who garrotes a prisoner because he is dead to the meaning of his action in the order of the spiritual reality are brothers under the skin. Phenomenalism has gone further toward transforming our society into the combination of a slaughterhouse with a booby hatch than many contemporaries are still sane enough to realize."[29] Voegelin's critique of modernity is not all that different from Horkheimer and Adorno's assessment of the achievements of Western enlightenment.

The reductionist epistemology that Horkheimer exposed in his book, *The Eclipse of Reason*, as the basis of the American social sciences and the reality they uncritically investigated and thereby justified was also at the center of Voegelin's books. In that sense one can truly say that they all revolted against modernity. In the case of Voegelin, his memorandum concerning Herbert Marcuse's postretirement employment spells out in 1969 what he already expressed in 1952 in *The New Science of Politics*. In 1969 he even agreed with Marcuse's radical critique and included the most prominent student leader of the May 1968 demonstrations of Paris in his memorandum when he wrote: ". . . he expresses the same disgust at the various schools of descriptive institutionalism, behaviorism, quantifying sociology, and so forth, as does Cohn-Bendit in his attack on the sociologists at Nanterre. The criticisms are well taken, and I agree with them

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[29] Eric Voegelin, *The New Order and Last Orientations*. Ed. by Jürgen Gebhardt/Thomas Hollweck. Columbia/London 1991, p. 192 (= *Collected Works of E.V.*, Vol. 25). Dt.: Eric Voegelin, Phänomenalismus, *Occasional Papers*, XLIV, München: Eric-Voegelin-Archiv, 2004.

heartily."[30] Yet as much as he agreed with the Parisian students and the Frankfurt demolition of positivism and its ever rising influence in the American social sciences and intellectual life in general his critique included also the epistemological self-understanding of the original and the later Frankfurt School. Leo Loewenthal invoked the original vision when he accused the postmodernists for having abandoned "the Jewish-messianic heritage . . . all utopian hope." He mentioned Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin and reminded his listeners in Frankfurt of Adorno's sense of a "classic faithfulness in the healing of damaged life."[31] The phrase "damaged life" alluded to Adorno's essays from 1951, *Minima Moralia*, which were subtitled "Reflections from Damaged Life" and presented a haunting portrayal of a world on death watch.

For Voegelin this Jewish-messianic heritage had done irreversible damage to Western civilization. He called it "gnosticism" and defined it as the "nature of modernity".[32] This anti-messianic, anti-gnostic direction of Voegelin's work from the 1940s to the late 1960s gained him growing conservative support, especially in the U.S., and hostility on the left in the U.S. and Germany. His understanding of gnosticism, its ancient and medieval roots and its modern transformations, he summarized in his Inaugural Lecture at the University of Munich in November 1958 and published as a book, *Wissenschaft, Politik und Gnosis*, in 1959. This book solidified his reputation as a conservative philosopher. Taubes, the specialist in Jewish and Christian apocalyptic thought, was fascinated by the way Voegelin reconstructed the history of revolutionary speculation from the Old Testament and ancient gnosticism to modernity. The 90 letters between them from 1952 to 1978 that are part of the Voegelin papers at the Hoover Institution give no indication of any major political and intellectual disagreement. Taubes always assumed what the philosopher Ernst Bloch told Voegelin after listening to a lecture

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[30] See # 21.

[31] Loewenthal, *Untergang der Dämonologie*, p. 8.

[32] Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*; in: *Modernity without Restraint*. Ed. by Manfred Henningsen, Columbia/London 2000, p. 175 (= *Collected Works of E.V.*, Vol. 5).

by him in August 1964 in Salzburg on philosophy of history: "Mr.Voegelin, I have just discovered that we are brothers in the spirit."[33] Voegelin was certainly not convinced of this spiritual brotherhood since he did not see himself as a gnostic thinker, a characterization he frequently used for Bloch. To Voegelin it was an almost terminal condemnation because it went to the heart of his understanding of modernity. In the essay, "The Murder of God", which he wrote for the extended book publication of the Inaugural Lecture, "Science, Politics, and Gnosticism", he summarized his anti-gnostic, anti-messianic position: "The aim of parousiastic gnosticism is to destroy the order of being, which is experienced as defective and unjust, and through man's creative power to replace it with a perfect and just order. Now, however the order of being may be understood -- as a world dominated by cosmic-divine powers in the civilizations of the Near and Far East, or as the creation of a world transcendent God in Judaeo-Christian symbolism, or as an essential order of being in philosophical contemplation -- it remains something that is given, that is not under man's control. In order therefore, that the attempt to create a new world may seem to make sense, the givenness of the order of being must be obliterated, the order of being must be interpreted, rather, as essentially under man's control. And taking control of being further requires that the transcendent origin of being be obliterated: it requires the decapitation of being -- the murder of God."[34]

This incrimination of the modern will to power as being rooted in a rebellion against the divine order of things leaves in suspension the attitude toward the features of modernity that are at the center of the negative critique of modernity by the old masters of the Frankfurt School. The modern economic world system with its global reach through technology and market mechanisms, this most remarkable actualization of Western Enlightenment, remained marginal in Voegelin's critique. The success story of Enlightenment which engendered the growing sense of melancholy for Horkheimer and

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[33] See my account in "Eric Voegelin und die Deutschen", in: *Merkur*, Vol. 545 (1994), p. 727.

[34] Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, in: *Modernity without Restraint*, p. 278.

Adorno in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and in Adorno's *Minima Moralia* did not leave major traces in Voegelin's work. He shared the Frankfurt critique of instrumental reason in all its banal scholarly varieties. Yet the successful remaking of the world in the image of this reductionist meaning and fulfillment of basic libidinous desires, like greed and power, did not become a central theme in his philosophy. The destructive forces of modernity he identified primarily as an outgrowth of the ideological empires of communist and fascist persuasion in the 20th century. Why did global capitalism and the U.S. as one of its imperial managing regimes not become included in this critique? His observations in 1945 and 1953 did not become part of the political vision with which he returned to Germany.

In a limited political sense, Voegelin presents already at the end of *The New Science of Politics* in 1952 the arguments that the authors of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* would include, to the consternation of their readers, in the preface to the new edition in 1969. Voegelin wrote in 1952: "Western society as a whole . . . is a deeply stratified civilization in which the American and English democracies represent the oldest, most firmly consolidated stratum of civilizational tradition, while the German area represents its most progressively modern stratum."[35] He hoped that the Anglo-American democracies would remain the strongest powers "repressing Gnostic corruption and restoring the forces of civilization." This obvious reference to the communist regimes of the early 1950s became somewhat updated by Horkheimer and Adorno in 1969 when they shocked the German culture scene, but especially their students who formed the vanguard of the German student rebellion, with a prefatorial statement that attempted to tone down their outspoken critique of liberal politics. They wrote: “In a period of political division into immense powerblocks, set objectively upon collision, the sinister trend continues. The conflicts in the Third World and the renewed growth of totalitarianism are just as little mere historical episodes as, according to the *Dialectic*, was Fascism in its time. Today critical thought (which does not abandon its commitment even in the face of progress) demands support for the

[35] Voegelin, *Modernity without Restraint*, p. 241.

residues of freedom, and for tendencies toward true humanism, even if these seem powerless in regard to the main course of history."[36]

This encoded celebration of liberal Western democracy had been totally absent in their archeology of enlightenment from Homeric Greece to the 20th century. The Hegelian, Marxist, Jewish messianic background of their thinking did not allow the inclusion of a discussion of the Greek *polis* regime, the Roman republic, European republicanism, liberal constitutionalism or Social Democratic reformism. All these moderately ameliorating political regimes were anathema for the founding generation of the Frankfurt School in their Marxist phase. They had to acknowledge these civilizing formations in Western history at the end of their intellectual careers. Ironically, Habermas tried to teach them some of these lessons in his first major book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). Yet this introduction to civil society, which skipped the USA completely and was written from a Marxist perspective, was not accepted by them as thesis for the Habilitation in Frankfurt. Habermas had to go to the University of Marburg and get the support from the orthodox Marxist political scientist Wolfgang Abendroth,[37]and thus receive the academic certification for a teaching career at a German university.

For Voegelin the problem was not his lack of information about the political formations of the West. His first book *On the Form of the American Mind* (1928)[38] was his report about the discovery of a society which European intellectual elites had not been interested in since its founding in the 18th century.[39] In addition, he had worked on a voluminous *History of Political Ideas* in the 1940s and covered most of that historical territory from ancient Greece to the 20th

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[36] Horkheimer/Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. IXf.

[37] See Rolf Wiggershaus, *Die Frankfurter Schule. Geschichte. Theoretische Entwicklung. Politische Bedeutung*. Munich 1986, p. 617.

[38] Eric Voegelin, *On the Form of the American Mind*. Ed. by Jürgen Gebhardt/Barry Cooper. Baton Rouge/London 1995 (= *Collected Works of E.V.*, Vol., 1).

[39] See my review of the book in: *The Review of Politics* (1996), Vol. 58, p. 625ff.

century. One of the central themes of his intellectual work was the opposition to any speculative closure of history. Since no eschatological *telos* framed his vision toward the future, it neither blocked it toward the past. History was an open ended process with a plural field of civilizations with no known end in sight. Therefore, for Voegelin, global capitalism was simply another monstrous ecumenic formation with hegemonic qualities that have been part of world history since the ecumenic age became inaugurated by Persian, Macedonian, Hellenistic, Indian and Roman rulers beginning in the 5th century B.C. The volume on that period, *The Ecumenic Age* (1974) in his *Order and History* (all volumes are now translated into German as *Ordnung und Geschichte*) deals with the sequel of empires and the symbolic responses to them. In the fifth and last volume of *Order and History*, the posthumous *In Search of Order* (1987), he compresses in a rather detached way historical experiences of massive destruction and dislocation and adds them to the usual miseries of human life that Hesiod listed as "hunger, hard work, disease, early death, and the injuries the weaker must suffer at the hands of the stronger."[40] A general pattern of dissatisfaction emerges in response to the imperial juggernauts beginning in the ecumenic age. Voegelin writes: “From the political-pragmatic side one would have to consider the vast destruction of ethnic cultures by the imperial entrepreneurs of the Ecumenic Age and the subsequent rise of imperial-dogmatic civilizations from the wreckage of the ecumenic empires. For the modern period one would have to add the creation of the power differential between the Western and all other civilizations through the intellectual, scientific, commercial and industrial revolutions in the West, as well as the exploitation of the differential to the global limits; the decline of Western power and order through the internal conflicts caused by the rise of imperial nationalisms and of equally imperial ideological movements; and the resistance of the non-Western civilizational societies to the destruction of their own cultures by a Western global ecumenism.”[41]

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[40] Eric Voegelin, *In Search of Order*. Baton Rouge/London 1987, p. 35f.

[41] Voegelin, *In Search of Order*, p. 35f.

In this global sketch of imperial domination over two and a half millennia, no *telos* of meaning is attached to the imperial regimes themselves or the cultural resistance that responds to the various configurations. Compared to the eschatological visions of Jewish-Christian apocalyptics and the messianic expectations of Enlightenment philosophers, neither the victory nor the defeat of empires provides meaning. The pragmatic record of power in the world is of not much interest to Voegelin. The difference between him on the one hand and Horkheimer and Adorno on the other is that this insight did not paralyze him. Unlike the Frankfurt philosophers, he never believed in the apocalyptic expectation of a radical transfiguration of reality. Greek philosophy protected him against the temptations of ancient and modern messianism and the melancholy that came with the realization that fundamental features of human nature were beyond change. Voegelin's experiential realism immunized him against all forms of messianic thinking. Yet one could possibly say with some conviction that Voegelin's phobia against the *vita activa* may have originated in his fatalistic understanding of modernity.

The intellectual immunity against messianism did not mean that history was for Voegelin without meaning. Surprisingly enough, Voegelin, Horkheimer, Adorno and Habermas agree, more or less, on the beginning of the history of consciousness. Obviously they are interested in it for different reasons. They all subscribe to an analysis of the original situation from which the history of meaning takes its different paths. Voegelin writes about his view in *The Ecumenic Age*: "The truth of revelation and philosophy has become fatal to the intracosmic gods; and the removal of the gods from the cosmos has set a dedivinized nature free to be explored by science."[42] Horkheimer and Adorno add already their own interpretation to the story when they begin the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* with a reference to the modern Enlightenment project; yet the original moment of truth transformation is nevertheless clearly present when they state: "In the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and

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[42] Eric Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*. Ed. by Michael Franz. Columbia/London 2000, p. 53 (= *Collected Works of E.V.*, Vol. 17).

establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant. The program of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy."[43]

Invoking Francis Bacon's view on the new, enlightening knowledge, they wrote: ". . . the human mind, which overcomes superstition, is to hold sway over a disenchanted nature. Knowledge, which is power, knows no obstacles: neither in the enslavement of men nor in compliance with the world's rulers."[44] And: "There is to be no mystery -- which means, too, no wish to reveal mystery." Finally: "On the road to modern science, men renounce any claims to meaning."[45] When Habermas is defending "occidental rationalism" against the irrational tendencies in his West German intellectual lifeworld in the 1970s, he returns to Max Weber's thesis on disenchantment. Unlike Voegelin, however, who in his *The New Science of Politics* criticized Weber's relativism in matters of truth and meaning, Habermas endorses and updates Weber's intellectual project of understanding the successful Western expulsion of the gods and the human usurpation of the management of the world. Habermas writes in his most Weberian work, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981): "What is decisive for Weber, however, is that this process, which lends institutional and motivational embodiment to structures of consciousness, is itself a rationalization process. In the same way as modern science and autonomous art, ethical and juridical rationalism is the result of a differentiation of value spheres that is in turn the result of a process of disenchantment reflected at the level of worldviews. Occidental rationalism is preceded by religious rationalization. And Weber deliberately brings this universal-historical process of the disenchantment of mythical interpretive systems under the concept of rationalization as well."[46]

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[43] Horkheimer/Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 3.

[44] Ibid., p. 4.

[45] Ibid., p. 5.

[46] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Vol. I: *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Boston 1984, p. 167.

For Habermas the history of disenchantment produces a *tabula rasa* and removes the need for symbolic meaning. The expansion of empirical knowledge, predictive capacities, and the instrumental and organizational mastery of empirical processes will enable humans to live a more autonomous life than under the irrational circumstances that were reflected in myth and religion. He actually criticizes Weber for not having drawn these self-evident conclusions with regard to the "moral-practical complex of rationality, a form of religious ethic of brotherliness secularized at the same level as modern science and autonomous art, a communicative ethic detached from its foundation in salvation religion . . ."[47]

Neither Voegelin nor the old masters of the Frankfurt School could accept Habermas' radical agnosticism. For the old Frankfurt philosophers it was not only the memory of Jewish messianism that kept them from moving in that direction. Walter Benjamin's struggle with Jewish spirituality is known from many of his writings, among them the texts on philosophy of history from the years in exile up to the suicide at the French-Spanish border in 1940, but especially through Gershom Scholem's reports about their long friendship.[48] Yet even in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that melancholy farewell to progress, one finds spiritual reflections whose clarity of meditation is surprising. Voegelin would have recognized -- if he had read the text which, to my knowledge, he has not -- the mystic core in these meditative attempts, though they remain isolated in the body of their history of enlightenment from the myths in ancient Greece to the culture industry of modern America. Horkheimer and Adorno wrote in 1944: "Jewish religion allows no word that would alleviate the despair of all that is mortal. It associates hope only with the prohibition against calling on what is false as God, against invoking the finite as the infinite, lies as truth. The guarantee of salvation lies in the rejection of any belief that would replace it: it is knowledge obtained in the denunciation of

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[47] Ibid., p. 242.

[48] See Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin. The Story of a Friendship*. Boston 1984, p. 167.

illusion."[49] This negative theology of the Frankfurt School remained a reflective gesture. Though it never became developed, it marks the boundaries between the Frankfurt generations. It also clarifies some of the affinities that are so striking in the critique of modernity by Voegelin and, for example, Horkheimer, Adorno, Benjamin and Marcuse.

Voegelin left never any doubt about his position concerning the disenchantment of the world. He recognized the removal of the gods and the empowerment of humans in the running of worldly affairs as consequences of the discovery of consciousness in the human experience and symbolization of reality. As he elaborated: "Still . . . these consequences . . . must not obscure the fact that the differentiation of existential truth does not abolish the cosmos in which the event occurs. Regarding its existence and structure, however, the cosmos is experienced as divinely created and ordered. The new truth can affect the belief in intracosmic divinities as the most adequate symbolization of cosmic-divine reality, but it cannot affect the experience of divine reality as the creative ordering force in the cosmos."[50] Voegelin's insistence on the constancy of the search for a transcendent grounding of reality enabled him to speak about this experience in more than the Western civilizational context. If the first three volumes of his *Order and History* suffered from a Eurocentric focus in the broadest sense of the term, the last two volumes overcame the limits of this privileged Western perspective. Yet even as the author of the early volumes, Voegelin could not have accepted the consciously Eurocentric position that Habermas takes in *The Theory of Communicative Action* when he unequivocally declares: "We are implicitly connecting a claim to *universality* with *our occidental understanding of the world*. In determining the significance of this claim, it would be well to draw a comparison with the mythical understanding of the world."[51] For him mythical worldviews share the characteristics of religious worldviews. "Mythical worldviews are not understood by

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[49] Horkheimer/Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 23.

[50] Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, p. 53.

[51] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. I, p. 44.

members as interpretive systems that are attached to cultural traditions, constituted by internal interrelations of meaning, symbolically related to reality, and connected with validity claims -- and thus exposed to criticism and open to revision."[52] Voegelin's entire work in the area of comparative civilizational meaning questions this basic premise. The lack of reflexivity that Habermas posits Voegelin denies by engaging in a close reading of symbolic texts and placing them in their appropriate historical context. In that respect, Voegelin is open toward the diversity of civilizational universes of meaning whereas Habermas doubts their relevance and importance for the universal rationalism of occidental origin that he pursues.

As much as Voegelin and Habermas were apart in the understanding of historical myth and religion, they did not disagree tremendously in their preference for the best obtainable political order, after Habermas had overcome his Marxist expectations for a total transformation of society. In a way, Habermas performed a similarly dramatic course correction as Horkheimer and Adorno had done in the 1960s. In 1992, in the pensive essay "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," Habermas elaborated his change of outlook. He confirmed his theoretical indebtedness to Wolfgang Abendroth's orthodox Marxist views of a socialist democracy when writing his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Yet the totalizing perspective had become "questionable in the meantime", obviously referring, among other things, to the delegitimation of state socialism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Habermas wrote in 1992: “. . . the presumption that society as a whole can be conceived as an association writ large, directing itself via the media of law and political power, has become entirely implausible in view of the high level of complexity of functionally differentiated societies. The holistic notion of a societal totality in which the associated individuals participate like the members of an encompassing organization is particularly ill suited to provide access

[52] Ibid., p. 52f.

to the realities of an economic system regulated through market and of an administrative system regulated through power."[53]

By the 1980s, Habermas had become a defender of the constitutional regimes that had emerged in Great Britain, the USA and France in the 18th and 19th century and succeeded, after the Nazi period, in West Germany also. He began to use the term "*Verfassungspatriotismus*" (constitutional patriotism)[54] in order to demonstrate his political commitment to the achievements of the West German polity. He became a citizen-philosopher whose critical interventions in West German and, after unification, German political affairs had impact on debates in the public sphere. Neither the older Frankfurt philosophers nor Voegelin ever gained this prominent position in German civil society. Only Hannah Arendt's Heidelberg teacher, the philosopher Karl Jaspers, succeeded repeatedly from 1945 to his death in 1969, to perform a similar role. Yet like the older Frankfurt philosophers and Voegelin also, Jaspers kept a suspicious distance because of the Nazi collaborationist past of many members of the German elites. For Habermas this played also a role, yet he was already speaking to and for a German generation that was untainted by that past. In addition, unlike Jaspers, Voegelin, Horkheimer and Adorno, he did not have to settle a personal score with Germany. He was too young to have been exiled or dismissed from office. Their existential alienation from modernity was too radical and too much anchored in an essential understanding of the human condition to invest any hope in short or long range political strategies or to nostalgically believe in the feasibility of returning to any past. It is quite conceivable that Voegelin, in one of his frequent sarcastic moments, would have suggested, to the applause of his left 'brothers in the spirit', that the postmodernists be appointed to the task of presiding over the endgame of modernity. Yet it is also highly doubtful whether they would have overcome their skeptic or melancholy frame of mind and assisted Habermas, or competed with him, in discussing or even

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[53] J. Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere", in: Craig Calhoun (Ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, Mass. 1992, p. 443.

[54] Jürgen Habermas, *Die nachholende Revolution*. Frankfurt 1990, p. 447ff.

designing achievable scenarios for a politics of the good life at the beginning of a new millennium.

The closest Voegelin ever came to articulating his personal understanding of politics can be found in a letter from 1953 to a Jesuit priest in Louvain. The Frankfurt philosophers might have accepted Voegelin's formula despite its Machiavellian overtones. He wrote: ". . . I do not see how one can get in politics beyond the minimization of evil. To give a concrete example: in order to win the war against Hitler, the alliance with Russia (probably an evil in itself) had to be entered; once it had been entered, the ally had to be given his way in settling certain Eastern European questions (certainly evil in itself)." He reflects on the "ambiguous" use of "evil" measures and tells the Jesuit: "If it means that political measures never must incidentally (inflict) misery on human beings, politics and order are impossible; one can only withdraw into quietistic suffering. Means should be termed evil only when (1) either the end is evil … or (2) when the evil inflicted by the means is palpably greater than the good achieved by their use." Politics should be guided by the "principle of the maximalization of good and minimalization of evil."[55]

[55] Letter April 26 1953, to Father Thomas Clancy, S.J. *Selected Correspondence*, p. 157.

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