

APSA: Voegelin Meeting 2008 Saturday August 30: Strauss/Voegelin on Faith and Reason

Copyright 2008 Angela Miceli ♦ Discussant Remarks

Our panel today focuses on the work of two crucial scholars who worked to restore the authentic pursuit of philosophizing within society ♦ Eric Voegelin and Leo Strauss. All of the papers presented here today highlight this principal academic and spiritual mission of both men. Both Strauss' and Voegelin's work can be viewed as a response to the crisis of modernity ♦ a crisis that for Strauss and Voegelin was wrought of the misconstrued anthropology of the human person. Strauss and Voegelin both see the problem of modernity as inextricably bound to the question of man's knowing and man's being. Modernity obscures what man can know about the divine, himself, and society and how he can come to know about them. But the obscuring of what can be known is rooted in a deeper problem of what man is--and modernity reduces man to his physical components. Modernity results in a revolt against what is and against what can be known; it is a revolt of man against himself, his condition, and against God. As Voegelin rightly states, "One cannot revolt against God with revolting against reason and vice versa ♦ (Autobiographical Reflections, 76). The modern revolt not only leads to a distortion of philosophy and reason, but also of faith and revelation. I think for both Strauss and Voegelin ♦ the faultily conceived relationship between faith and reason is the core the problem of modernity.

This leads us to the subject of our panel. All of us here would agree that faith and reason must be able to speak to one another in some fashion. But it is difficult to conceptualize how this ought to happen. How do Strauss and Voegelin attempt to resolve the problem of modernity with respect to relationship between faith and reason? Some basic questions I have for the whole panel are as such: Both Strauss and Voegelin are responding to modernity in their respective analyses of faith and reason, religion and philosophy. Do their reflections on this relationship

adequately help to resolve the problem that modernity has placed on faith and reason? Or rather, do they continue in the same problems? What are the implications of their reflections on faith and reason? My remarks today will focus primarily on Professors Corey and Cooper's papers, but are extended to the other papers as well.

To start with Dr. Corey's paper on Voegelin's perspective of religious experience. You admittedly start with two exaggerated examples of modern ideas of religious experience: an emotionally charged conversion experience and a strict reliance on dogmas based upon historical traditions. The former relies solely on faith and can easily become a derailed experience leading to radical political action (such as the modern Gnostics in Voegelin's view). However, the latter is based primarily on reason and risks stagnating and debasing the initial experience of transcendence ♦ thereby losing the insight gained from it. These extremes are rejected by Voegelin ♦ because they still place faith and reason against one another. Leo Strauss perhaps exacerbates the issue because, as all papers have pointed out, he rejects any reconciliation between faith and reason, as he famously writes, "No one can be both a philosopher and a theologian, or for that matter, a third which is beyond the conflict between philosophy and theology, or a synthesis between both. . . . There is a fundamental conflict or disagreement between the Bible and Greek philosophy. ♦ (Mutual Influence, 217). But, as you show Voegelin is gives a very multi-faceted discussion of faith and reason.

Voegelin's view of religious experience, based upon your analysis is dependent upon "an act of questioning [that is] itself constitutive of the human experience. ♦ (p. 8). It is the act of questioning, you posit, that for Voegelin becomes the foundation for both the act of philosophizing and for religious experience. This act is based upon the primary experience of

transcendence that draws man out of himself toward the Divine Ground. Faith and reason become two modes of knowing based on a common experience of transcendence and response to transcendence that is to be maintained through a balance of the tension between "anxiety and questioning.❖ You point to several problems with Voegelin's views on religious experience ❖ but I want to focus on one in particular. You say in your paper that "in the name of noetic control, [Voegelin] seems to confine the Christian experience within the language and experience of classical philosophy.❖ This will relate to both Professors Ranieri's and Cooper's papers.

You agree with Professor Ranieri that Voegelin (and indeed Strauss as well) seem to place a primacy of philosophy over religion. Strauss is perhaps more explicit on this point, but Voegelin does not claim to be doing so. Yet, despite Voegelin's claims to the contrary, he almost seems to define faith in terms of noetic experience. (Of course, one cannot ignore the vast work of Voegelin on the pneumatic experience of Israel). But Voegelin perhaps views a greater risk of derailment in pneumatic experiences as evident from his treatment of St. Paul in the Ecumenic Age to point to one example. Thus, for Voegelin it seems as though noetic experience is of greater import, because it serves as a check on the pneumatic experiences that require a much greater balance of consciousness. First of all, is this a fair assessment of Voegelin's view on noetic and pneumatic experience? If it is true, how does faith then preserve its own dignity in light of this critique of Voegelin?

To take the problem even further, Voegelin claims to be indeed eradicating the conventional distinctions between faith and reason. He writes that "the dichotomies of Faith and Reason, Religion and Philosophy, Theology and Metaphysics can no longer be used as ultimate terms of reference when we have to deal with experiences of divine reality with their rich

diversification in the ethnic cultures of antiquity. . . . We can no longer ignore that the symbols of Faith express the divine quest of man just as much as the revelatory appeal, and that the symbols of Philosophy express the revelatory appeal just as much as the responsive quest. (The Beginning and the Beyond, p. 211) Does Voegelin tend to define religious experience in terms of classical *noesis*. What then is the limitation of noetic experience? Does philosophy have a limitation?

Perhaps Voegelin would answer these questions by saying that noetic experience is participatory. Man actually participates in the Divine, which is ever beckoning to each human person. But this brings up another problem which is Voegelin's reliance on a particular kind of experience ♦ a participatory one. Professor Sandoz explains that the experience of *participation* "sharpens and deepens to become emphatic partnership with God. A radical new relationship between man and the source of the order of being is discovered, and this discovery necessitates an equally radical reorientation of individual existence. By Plato, this radical reorientation is symbolized as the *periagoge*, the turning of the whole soul . . .; in Christianity, it is the conversion. ♦ (Voegelinian Revolution, p. 120). But then this reliance upon experience might place him too close to those who base religion on a conversion experience. And Strauss would be critical of this reliance on experience, Daniel Tanguay points out: "[For Strauss] the objective content of revelation dissolves into pure subjectivity of the man who experiences the presence of the Wholly Other. Strauss takes this critique even further: if the absolute encountered in this experience remains indeterminate, then could not this experience be of a nature other than religious? ♦ (Leo Strauss: Intellectual Biography, 158)

Finally, you ultimately seem dissatisfied with Voegelin's account of religious experience, while recognizing the necessity for some kind of renewed way of understanding this kind of experience. Given your critiques of Voegelin's account you point out in your paper, what is a better way? How should we amend what Voegelin says? How would that better establish a renewed relationship between faith and reason that both Strauss and Voegelin agree is so crucial to overcome the ideological thinking of the modern age? Pope Benedict XVI gives one view point in his Regensburg Address in 2006 wherein he traces what he calls the modern "de-hellinization" of Biblical faith. He asserts that faith and reason must come together again in a new way, one that re-articulates the relationship between Greek philosophy and Biblical faith, as "the fundamental decisions made about the relationship between faith and the use of human reason are part of the faith itself; they are developments consonant with the nature of faith itself." The study of faith, he writes "rightly belongs in the university and within the wide-ranging dialogue of sciences, not merely as a historical discipline and one of the human sciences, but precisely as theology, as inquiry into the rationality of faith." How do Strauss and Voegelin contribute to this restoration of "inquiry into the rationality of faith"? (Quotes from the Regensburg address taken from <http://www.zenit.org/article-16955?l=english>).

Moving on to Professor Cooper's paper. You give an excellent summary of the scholarly treatment of Voegelin and Strauss' understandings of the relationship between faith and reason. Your treatment of Lawrence and Gebhardt's essays bring one question to mind. Is Voegelin's blending of the distinction between faith and reason tenable? You almost seem to suggest that it is not, but then you seem to favor reason at the end, saying that "even the heart's subconscious love" that Lawrence invoked toward the end of his essay to balance Gebhardt's "rationalism" needs to be made intelligible. What makes the heart's subconscious love intelligible? Is it a

work of theology or of philosophy? Your paper excellently shows that Strauss' view of the incompatibility of faith and reason is much more nuanced than would seem at first glance. As you point out in your paper, his sharp distinction of the two is to show that faith and reason cannot refute one another and they must each take the claims of the other seriously. Your paper concludes that Voegelin and Strauss end up fundamentally doing the same thing — elevating and re-defining human reason. But they differ on some fundamental points. For example, you write that for Voegelin, "there is no Beyond beyond the experience of the presence of the Beyond." (p.8) This suggests a kind of subjectivity to the nature of the revelation of transcendence, whether the pursuit is philosophy or theology. Yet, for Strauss you write that he emphasizes "the externality or objectivity of revelation as an event that human beings can accept or reject, to be sure, but the reality of which does not depend on acceptance or rejection." (p. 40) So what are we to understand about revelation? Is it bound to our experience or is it something that continues despite that experience? How would Strauss respond to Voegelin's notion of human nature as fundamentally participatory? One final question. At the end of your paper, you suggest that Strauss's position on faith and reason contain all the essential features of Voegelin. You point to Voegelin's Gospel and Culture essay as an illustration. Yet, it is still unclear to me what Strauss means by revelation. He speaks very much of the Old Testament, but not as often of the New. This is obviously on account of his Jewish background. But I would like to know why this makes a difference, that is to say, how does the Jewish background of Strauss shape his treatment of faith and reason, religion and philosophy? How does this make his view differ from that of Voegelin? Even if they both focus on man's questioning — how do their different notions of the relationship between faith and reason shape the questions that are to be asked?

I thank the panelists for their excellent papers, and I look forward to our discussion.

