Voegelin's Debt to Augustine: The Mortgage of the City of God

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"For those who do no have the power [of seeing the invisible attributes of God understood through the things that are made], and nevertheless, 'live by faith in Christ (Rom. 1:7)' acquire a perception of these things more assuredly and more happily after this life; but if the faith of Christ who is 'the one mediator of God and man (I Tim. 2:5)' be wanting to those who have the power, they perish with all their wisdom."[1]

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[1] Augustine. *The Retractions.* trans. Sister M. Inez Bogan, R.S.M. in *The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 60.* Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1968. p. 46

There exists a general connection within the scholarly literature between Eric Voegelin and Augustine of Hippo that is vague at best. This connection arises naturally as Eric Voegelin's collected works have frequent references and comments on Augustine indicating that he is never far from Voegelin's mind. Augustine even holds the honor of providing the epigraph to Voegelin's *Order and History* volumes. Yet for all this it remains difficult to determine the true relation of Voegelin with the great Church Father. Voegelin's approach to his project in *Order and History* shifted before producing the volume that would have substantively addressed the Church Father, and Voegelin's section on the saint in his *History of Political Ideas* is not nearly as original and provocative as many of his other sections. Despite the lack of sustained treatment, Voegelin does single out Augustine for special commentary and praise at certain points. He even goes as far as to point to a formulation of Augustine as "philosophically perfect." So the question may be clarified as what debt does Voegelin owe to St. Augustine.

The use of the word "debt" is intentional and must be clarified. While a systematic *Quellenforschung* study would be particularly interesting, it is not undertaken here. Rather, Voegelin's debt to Augustine is meant to indicate a dual intention; debt not only as something of what Voegelin appropriates from Augustine into his own thinking, but also more importantly something of what is still owed to Augustine. That is, does Voegelin's work retain a mortgage to Augustine? In order to unpack this problem, the first area of study must be Voegelin's comments on Augustine and whether they show influence that continues through Voegelin's philosophy.

Strauss-Voegelin Correspondence

Perhaps the most important information regarding Voegelin's debt to Augustine, comes not from Voegelin's published works, but from the exchange of letters he shared with

Leo Strauss. The focal statement comes in the midst of an exchange where the nature and position of revelation was initially broached because Voegelin seemed to think that Strauss had "retreated from an understanding of the prophetic (religious) foundation of philosophizing…to a theory of *episteme*," and that Strauss also "refuse[d] to see the problem of *episteme* in connection with experience, out of which it emerges."[2] Strauss bristled at the notion that he should have spoken in the manner in which Voegelin interprets him, and in reply he took the opportunity to stress the divide he saw between the thinking of the Middle Ages – "based on revelation" – and classical antiquity – "not based on revelation."[3] He further emphasized that the distinction between these two approaches must be maintained, both for the sake of philosophy and for revelation, and that, "No justifiable purpose is served by obscuring this contradiction, by the postulating of the *tertium* from there [i.e., from the classics and the Bible]. Every synthesis is actually an option either for Jerusalem or for Athens."[4]

In response to Strauss' challenge, Voegelin undertakes to briefly outline the equivalence of philosophy and revelation that will be a crucial part of his later philosophy. Voegelin writes:

> With respect to the relationship of science (and especially metaphysics) and revelation, Augustine seems to me in principle to have shown the way. Revealed knowledge is, in the building of human knowledge, that knowledge of the pregivens of perception (*sapientia*, closely related to the Aristotelian *nous* as distinguished from *episteme*). To these pregivens belongs the experience of man of himself as esse, nosse, velle, the inseparable primal experience… To these pregivens belongs further the being of God beyond time…Within this knowledge pregiven by *sapientia* stirs the philosophic *episteme*.[5]

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[2] Eric Voegelin. "Letter 36" in *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934-1964*. ed. Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993. p. 77
[3] Leo Strauss. "Letter 37," in *Faith and Political Philosophy* p. 78
[4] Ibid.
[5] Eric Voegelin. "Letter 38," in *Faith and Political Philosophy* p. 82-83

Here we can see something of an early version of his later differentiation of pneumatic and noetic experiences, and Augustine is said to be the important authority. To this statement we may compare a much later exposition:

> In [the] state of unrest, man experiences himself as moved from the ground and drawn into the search; he wants to escape from his ignorance and finds himself turned in the right direction by the tensional experiences of faith, hope, and love toward the divine ground; and he gains the desired knowledge when the search becomes luminous as a response to the movement of divine presence in the soul, when he becomes conscious of his search as not merely a human effort but as the event of a divine-human encounter in the Metaxy…Man is engaged in the search with the divinest part of his soul, with the *nous*. [6]

In this later formulation we can note that all reference to Augustine has disappeared, except for perhaps by implication in the reference to "faith, hope, and love."

The most important feature of Voegelin's statement in the correspondence is the connection of Augustine's understanding of *sapientia* with Greek *nous*. Voegelin's outline contained in this letter to Strauss is essentially a brief paraphrasing of Augustine's *De Trinitate*. Reason is inextricably connected with revelation because the gracious act of God, symbolized as *sapientia,* encapsulates the presuppositions of all perception upon which *scientia* depends. As Charles Norris Cochrane explains:

> Augustine replies [to his pagan opponents] with a challenge that reason itself present the credentials by virtue of which it presumes to operate. In other words he calls for a phenomenology of the human mind, as the preliminary to any real understanding of the thought and activity of men. The question which thus confronts him is: What must I accept as the fundamental elements of consciousness, the recognition of which is imposed upon me as an inescapable necessity of my existence as a rational animal. [7]

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[6] Eric Voegelin. "Beginning and the Beyond," in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 28, What is History? and Other Late Unpublished Writings*. ed. Thomas Hollweck and Paul Caringella. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990. p. 187

[7] Charles Norris Cochrane. *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action From Augustus to Augustine.* Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Press, 2003. p. 445

From this question we can understand how philosophic *episteme* is first stirred by *sapientia* or *nous*. The revelation or theophanic movement is prior to perception and therefore not to be disconnected from philosophy for fear of what Voegelin refers to as "pseuodproblems" or what Augustine terms "fantastica fornicatio," "the prostitution of the mind to its own fantasies."[8]

Here we seem on safe ground in noting the similarity between the two concepts, but it remains to be seen whether they are truly equivalent symbols. The connection of these symbols in this early correspondence is important because the reference to Augustinian *sapientia* disappears in Voegelin's later work. In fact, the connection of *sapientia* and *nous* may serve to explain why the direct reference to Augustine does not appear in Voegelin's later published work. In his later work, Voegelin appears to entirely depend on the classical conception of *nous* alone for the explication of his philosophy. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to construe the idea of Voegelin's debt to Augustine to the point of maintaining that he would never have arrived at his mature understanding without the influence of Augustine. However, in light of Strauss' repeated assertions that Voegelin's work deals with Christianity rather than strictly with philosophy,[9] it is appropriate to consider further the relation of Augustinian *sapientia* and classical *nous* as it would be understood by Plato, Aristotle, or Plotinus, as well as how Voegelin's philosophy may intermix these ideas in its development.

Before embarking on an examination of the difference between *nous* and *sapientia*, it is first helpful to consider Voegelin's actual published commentary on Augustine's work. Here Voegelin's reading of Augustine seems to be conditioned by his correlation of classical and

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[8] Vide Cochrane, p. 462 and *De Trinitate* XII.9.14
[9] Vide "Letter 39"

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Christian concepts. This reading also influences Voegelin's treatment of Christianity in general and limits his appropriation of and influence by Augustine.

Voegelin's Limited Commentary on Augustine

Though Voegelin commonly makes references to Augustine in his work, there are only two passages where Voegelin comes anywhere near a sustained treatment of an Augustinian text. Chronologically, the first is an examination of meditative ascent from the *Confessions* that appears in his unpublished *Herrschaftslehre,* and the second is an examination of a passage in *Enarrationes in Psalmos XLIV* that has scattered appearances in Voegelin's later works. In both cases, Voegelin disregards key features of Augustine's theology in favor of simply extracting his preferred material. Voegelin's method might be perplexing given his own imperative that it is an "elementary rule that a thinker's language takes precedence [over] the interpreter's,"[10] and that the "first rule of hermeneutics" is "that the meaning of the text must be established through interpretation of the linguistic corpus."[11] However, his textual analysis here is consistent with an implicit correlation of *sapientia* and *nous.* Therefore, it is perhaps understandable that in both cases Voegelin chooses to emphasize the common or general aspects of the gracious divine movement that are consistent with an equivalence with *nous,* while the material that Voegelin chooses to ignore or redirect is related to the doctrine and dogma of the work of Christ, which is a specific and particular grace that offers Christian *sapientia.* As his treatment of the *Expositions of the Psalms* is both lengthier and – compared to the *Herrschaftslehre* – more polished because published, we will begin our examination there.

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[10] Eric Voegelin. "Beginning and the Beyond," in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 28, What is History? and Other Late Unpublished Writings.* ed. Thomas Hollweck and Paul Caringella. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990. p. 196

[11] Eric Voegelin. *Order and History: Israel and Revelation.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956. p. 162

Voegelin considers Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos LXIV*, 2.42-44 to develop the category of exodus and references the passage in several writings. In his essay "Immortality: Experience and Symbol," Voegelin cites this passage in support of the assertion that, "The tension of faith toward God [is] not a Christian privilege but a trait of human nature" because, "St. Augustine…was well aware that the structure of history is the same as the structure of personal existence; and he did not hesitate to use, inversely, historical symbols to express the reality of personal tension."[12] In the *Ecumenic Age*, Voegelin references this passage to demonstrate Augustine's understanding of the problem of identity in the new ecumenic age. He writes, "The high point of [the problem of identity's] penetration was reached by St. Augustine when he discerned the movement of *amor Dei* as the existential exodus from the pragmatic world of power…and consequently, conceived the 'intermingling' of the *civitas Dei* with the *civitas terrena* as the In-Between reality of history."[13] Elsewhere, Voegelin explains, "I want to give you St. Augustine's formulation of the problem of exodus, for it very probably will never be surpassed. It is philosophically perfect…[and] it is also extremely beautiful."[14]

In *Anamnesis*, the *Ecumenic Age*, and the "Immortality" essay, Voegelin simply quotes the text of what he considers the important part of the passage, but in his essay on "Configurations of History" Voegelin provides a sustained commentary upon the text. Voegelin notes that this formulation of exodus is "more exact and precise than in the City of

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[12] Eric Voegelin. "Immortality: Experience and Symbol," in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 12, Published Essay: 1966-1985*. ed. Ellis Sandoz. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990. p. 78

[13] Eric Voegelin. *Order and History: The Ecumenic Age*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974. p. 172

[14] Eric Voegelin. "Configurations of History," in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 12, Published Essay: 1966-1985*. ed. Ellis Sandoz. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990. p. 105-06

God,"[15] despite its coming in a popular sermon. He develops Augustine's explanation that there are two "organizing centers" in the soul of man. "The two principle centers are love of self and love of God…Between these two centers there is continual tension: man is always inclined to fall into the love of self and away from the love of God."[16] "Exodus is defined by St. Augustine," Voegelin continues, "as the tendency to abandon one's entanglements with the world, to abandon the love of self, and to turn toward the love of God. When the tension is strongest toward the love of God, then we find an exodus from the world."[17] It is at this point that Voegelin finally introduces the actual quotation from Augustine.

We should pause briefly to discuss the sense of the translation of the passage from which Voegelin draws his analysis. The Latin text is: "*Incipit exire, qui incipit amare. Exeunt enim multi latenter, et exeuntium pedes sunt cordis affectus; exeunt autem de Babylonia.*" The provided translations of the passage differ between Collected Works, Volume 6 and Volume 12. But, as Voegelin's detailed discussion only appears in Volume 12, we should examine that translation and the implications that Voegelin draws from it. The translation provided in "Configuration of History" runs, "They begin to depart who begin to love. Many there are who depart and not know it. For their walk of departure is a movement of the heart. And yet they depart from Babylon."[18] The discrepancies between translations centers on the translation of: "*Exeunt enim multi latenter,*" particularly the implications of the word "*latenter.*" Voegelin's usage depends on the sense of the translation as "Many there are who depart and not know it," because he interprets this as "a subconscious process at first, for the walk of

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[15] Ibid. p. 105
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.

departure, the manner in which they abandon the world, is a movement of the heart toward

the love of God. And even if it is so subconscious that perhaps they do not even know it

themselves, they nevertheless depart."[19] This is the sense of the passage that provides

justification for Voegelin's assertion that "the tension of faith toward God [is] not a

Christian privilege but a trait of human nature." Therefore, Voegelin continues, "The

problem is reduced to what today we would call a philosophy of existence. St. Augustine

speaks of a fundamental tension, which all can experience; and so far as the formulation is

concerned, one cannot go beyond that."[20] However, the difficulty lies in Voegelin's

interpretation of the movement as a "fundamental tension" that "all can experience" and

"one cannot go beyond that" because it is a "subconscious" movement of the heart. Other

translations of this particular passage do not bear this out, nor does the entirety of

Augustine's sermon. The footnote provided for the text in Volume 12 supplies a citation for

another rendering of the text appearing in an 1849 Oxford translation of *Expositions on the

Book of Psalms*. That translation of the disputed passage runs, "For there go forth many men

secretly."[21] A more modern translation reads, "Many go forth in a hidden way."[22] Both of

these translations offer a more common rendering of "*latenter*," particularly as when it is

associated or linked with the idea of love. Neither of these two other translations allow for

the movement being unknown or subconscious to the participant. The matter is crucial

because it allows Voegelin to gloss over the full basis and purpose for which Augustine

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[19] Ibid. p. 105-06
[20] Ibid. p. 106
[21] Augustine. "Expositions on the Book of Psalms" in *A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic
    Church*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1849. p. *252*
[22] Augustine. *Expositions of the Psalms: Volume 3*. trans. Maria Boulding, O.S.B. New York:
    New City Press, 2001. p. 267

originally offers this reflection, and thus offers an insight into how Augustine would understand the relation of *nous* and *sapientia*.

The passage of text is not an isolated aphorism in Augustine's sermon, it appears in the second of eighteen sections. Voegelin has provided some of the context in his exposition of the "organizing centers" of love of self or God. He has, however, entirely neglected the key to the entire passage, what Augustine refers to as, "the drama of which our psalm sings."[23] Augustine builds the context of the passage by instructing his people "to understand first of all in what sense we are captives, and then to know our liberation."[24] Though all have been exiled and enslaved in Babylon, "the city of confusion,"[25] "The Lord who founded Jerusalem knows whom he has predestined to be her citizens. Though they may still be under the dominion of the devil, he knows them as destined to be redeemed by the blood of Christ; he knows them even before they know themselves."[26] Voegelin uses Augustine's remark to substantiate that, "The historical processes of exodus, exile, and return [are] figurations of the tension within being between time and eternity. Whichever form the exodus may adopt…the dynamism and direction of the process stem from the love of eternal being. The Exodus in the sense of *incipit exire qui incipit amare* is the classical formulation of the substantive principle of a philosophy of history."[27] According to Augustine, the drama is not simply the tension that drives the exodus, but the fact that this exodus has been accomplished by grace through the blood of Christ. Therefore, Augustine substantiates far more than that "the tension of faith toward God [is] not a Christian

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[23] Ibid. p. 266

[24] Ibid. p. 264

[25] Ibid. p. 265

[26] Ibid. p. 266

[27] Eric Voegelin. *Anamnesis* in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 6, Anamnesis: On a Theory of History and Politics.* ed. David Walsh. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1990. p. 337

privilege but a trait of human nature." Rather, he asserts that the fullest expression of the exodus must focus on Christ's work. As Dorothy Sayers has poignantly stated, "It is the dogma that is the drama."[28] More precisely, as Augustine points out, the doctrine of Christ's work accomplished on the cross is the drama of existence.

Our reflection on Voegelin's treatment of Augustine with regard to Voegelin's *Herrschaftslehre* can be much briefer, both because it is an early, unpublished writing of Voegelin's antecedent to his great projects and insights, and also because its focus is not directed entirely toward Augustine as much as it is toward an Augustinian-style meditation heavily influenced by Max Scheler.[29] William Petropulos summarizes Voegelin's effort in the *Herrschaftslehre* as, "toward the meditative study of the relationship of human personhood to the divine, and toward a recovery and renewal for the modern world of Augustine's path of meditation."[30] Petropolus continues, "Voegelin's own intention, to 'more closely define' the nature of the spiritual reality of human existence…is carried forward in the first chapter of the *Herrschaftslehre*. There Voegelin argues that St. Augustine has laid the basis for an understanding of the person in the exercise (*Vollzug*) of a meditation in which the human discovers himself or herself as a person."[31] In the *Herrschaftslehre* Voegelin takes a vaguely spiritual basis for this in the meditations of Augustine in Books X and XI of the *Confessions*.[32] He singles out Augustine's *via negationis* in Book X, 6 as the meditative form of negative ascent toward the soul coming to rest in God.

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[28] Dorothy Sayers. *Creed or Chaos?* Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1995. p. 25
[29] Vide William Petropulos. "The Person as *Imago Dei*: Augustine and Max Sheler in Eric Voegelin's *Herrschaftslehre* and *Political Religions*" in *The Politics of the Soul*. ed. Glenn Hughes. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999 for a detailed discussion of the influences of Augustine and Scheler on this work.
[30] Ibid. p. 90
[31] Ibid. p. 92
[32] Ibid. p. 93

Petropolus focuses his study of the *Herrschaftslehre* and *Political Religions* in asserting the foreshadowing of later Voegelinian principles within these early works. Petropolus particularly emphasizes the importance for Voegelin of "mediation as the basic form of philosophizing." Of this meditation he notes, "Meditation is the act in which the spirit attains openness to the ground of being by becoming this openness at the center of the self. This state, the 'open soul,' can through *superbia* and *amor sui* be lost again."[33] The desire to avoid closure through *superbia* may help to explain Voegelin's inclination toward examples of *via negationis*. As William Thompson has noted, "The fact that Voegelin speaks of an 'Augustinian type' [of mediation] rather than simply of a 'Christian type' appears deliberate…Voegein's coupling of the Augustinian form with the *Cloud of Unknowing* gives one the impression that he is thinking of a rather more 'apophatic' style of meditation."[34] However, as Thompson continues, "Christianity could never countenance a pure apophaticism, for it proclaims the incarnation of God…When Augustine writes that he 'was not humble enough to conceive of the humble Jesus Christ as [his] God,' he is indicating that he had been too enchanted with a pure apophaticism."[35] In this light we are prepared to see the differences between a philosopher's reading of the text and Augustine's intentions as a theologian.

In the *Confessions*, as previously in the *Exposition of the Psalms*, Voegelin's treatment of Augustine clearly demonstrates various aspects of avoiding what might be called positive or kataphatic elements of Augustine's writing. In his consideration of *Confessions* X, 6 the primary emphasis is on Augustine's negative ascent; however, in the actual text this part of

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[33] Ibid. p. 109

[34] William Thompson. "Philosophy and Meditation: Notes on Eric Voegelin's View" in *The Politics of the Soul*. ed. Glenn Hughes. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999. p. 124

[35] Ibid. Quoting *Confessions*, VII, 18

the meditation is secondary. Augustine first writes, "My love of you, O Lord, is not some vague feeling: it is positive and certain. Your word struck into my heart and from that moment I loved you."[36] Similarly, from later in the above *Expositions of the Psalms*, Augustine reflects, "Can love of our own city be revived in us, if through being abroad so long we have forgotten it? Yes, it can, for our Father has sent us letters. God has provided the scriptures for us, so that by these letters from him our longing to return home may be aroused."[37]

In both passages Voegelin neglects what is central in Augustine's view because he tends to universalize aspects of Augustine's Christianity so as to share them with non-believers. Augustine can certainly agree with Voegelin that all men live in the tension of faith, since they have been created *imago Dei,* but Augustine's writings also include expositions of grace where it is clear that man's faith is ultimately misplaced and mistaken unless its maker binds it.[38] Voegelin's contraction of grace through the neglect of dogma seems to be a primary distinction between these two thinkers, and we must consider Voegelin's criticism of dogma and whether the full expression of doctrine and dogma is necessary for Augustine's work. That is to ask whether the Christian grace of *sapientia* is truly equivalent with classical *nous*.

Ambiguity Towards Dogma

Voegelin's attitude towards doctrine and dogma is ambiguous at best. His works are replete with criticism and condemnation of the deformation of symbols into doctrinal statements of propositions. As Michael Morrissey has elaborated, "For Voegelin, the truth

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[36] Augustine. *Confessions.* trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin. New York: Penguin Books, 1961. p. 211
[37] *Expositions of the Psalms: Volume 3*, p. 267
[38] Cf. "It is not…through their own efforts that any human beings remain unbeaten but through that immutable law, being enslaved by which alone ensures anyone's freedom." Augustine. "True Religion" in *On Christian Belief.* ed. Boniface Ramsey. New York: New City Press, 2005. p. 88

of reality cannot become an object of intentionalist consciousness, because to make it so would risk hypostatizing it."[39] In this light Voegelin critiques "the genesis of 'religion'…defined as the transformation of existence in historical form into the secondary possession of a 'creed' concerning the relation between God and man,"[40] as a loss of the tension of divine-human encounter. While Voegelin will acknowledge the necessity for dogma as the institutional structure that exists for the transmission of noetic insights, he is particularly critical of its ultimate efficaciousness. Voegelin reflects:

> The prophets, philosophers, and saints, who can translate the order of the spirit into the practice of conduct without institutional support and pressure, are rare. For its survival in the world, therefore, the order of the spirit has to rely on a fanatical belief in the symbols of a creed more often than on the *fides caritate formata* – though such reliance, if it becomes socially predominant, is apt to kill the order it is supposed to preserve.[41]

Voegelin's criticism of dogma is meant to protect "the mystery" of the experience of the ground of being which is the basis for Christianity's original symbols. Voegelin emphatically states, "There can be no question of 'accepting' or 'rejecting' a theological doctrine. A vision is not a dogma but an event in metaleptic reality which the philosopher can do no more than try to understand to the best of his ability."[42] In the experiential vision of the ground the philosopher, prophet, or saint participates in the divine reality. If he communicates something of the experience in his attempts to understand, he cannot form propositions, only symbols of myth. "Divine reality beyond the Metaxy, if it is to be symbolized at all, can be symbolized only by the myth. The truth of the myth then is to be measured by the truth of noetically illuminated existence."[43] Voegelin asserts the measure for

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[39] Morrissey, p. 220
[40] *Israel and Revelation*, p. 376
[41] Ibid. p. 376-77
[42] *Ecumenic Age*, p. 242
[43] Ibid. p. 36

the symbols is the individual who can share in the noetic illumination of the experience. Here propositions of doctrine and dogma are not only unnecessary, they are also harmful. "What the philosopher moving in the field will see or not see, understand or not understand…depends on the manner in which his own existence has been formed through intellectual discipline in openness toward reality, or deformed by his uncritical acceptance of beliefs which obscure the reality of immediate experience."[44] We see the full development of Voegelin's thinking in two comments on dogma in the "Gospel and Culture" essay:

> For the gospel as a doctrine which you can take and be saved, or leave and be condemned, is a dead letter; it will encounter indifference, if not contempt, among inquiring minds outside the church, as well as the restlessness of the believer inside who is un-Christian enough to be man the questioner.[45]

> Least of all can anything be achieved by pitting right doctrine against wrong doctrine, for doctrinization precisely is the damage that has been inflicted on the movement of the search.[46]

Christians can certainly be amenable to Voegelin's critique of doctrinalization since figures from Paul to Aquinas to Luther have considered the problem of the spirit versus the dead letter of the law. Christians have always recognized the problem and its possibility within the development of the institutional Church, but have also understood that there was more to the Church's life than simply ossification. Voegelin can rightly note that, "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

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[44] Eric Voegelin. "Equivalence of Experience and Symbolization in History," in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 12, Published Essay: 1966-1985*. ed. Ellis Sandoz. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990. p. 116

[45] Eric Voegelin. "Gospel and Culture," in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 12, Published Essay: 1966-1985*. ed. Ellis Sandoz. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990. p. 174

[46] Ibid. p. 178

the spirit to break a balance that has become demonic imprisonment."[47] Christians can also

agree with Voegelin's warning against doctrine on the basis that men must "be capable of

imaginative re-enactment of the experiences of which theory is an explication…Unless a

theoretical exposition activates the corresponding experiences at least to a degree, it will

create the impression of empty talk or will perhaps be rejected as an irrelevant expression of

subjective opinions."[48] However, within the Christian context this is not an indictment of

Christianity, but rather of ossification that will always be escaped by a spiritual revival that

will work within the traditional symbols and not discard them in favor of new formulations.[49]

Common Christian Critique: Equivalence of Symbols

Some Christians are scandalized by comments from Voegelin that do not entail a

definitive separation between experiences of order before and after Christ. For instance

when Voegelin writes, "The differences between prophecy, classic philosophy, and the

gospel must be sought in the degrees of differentiation of existential truth."[50] Such

statements from the later Voegelin tended to disturb Christians who had preferred to use his

earlier language of "leaps in being." Michael Morrissey, however, explains Voegelin's

movement away from his own earlier formulations with the publication of the *Ecumenic Age*:

"Expansion of the spiritual horizon, along with the new emphasis on 'the equivalence of

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[47] *Israel and Revelation*, p. 183

[48] Eric Voegelin. *The New Science: An Introduction.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
        p. 64-65

[49] Thinking through Voegelin's critique in his own work, David Walsh has reflected,
"Nowadays we think of the formation of canons and the formulation of dogmas as
controlling devices by which institutions consolidate their power. No doubt that is a
component, but it is by no means the most important aspect. Of far greater significance has
been their role in preventing the substance of transcendent experiences from draining away
in a profusion of different directions…Dogmas arise out of the devotional life of the
Christian community, but they also play a role in preserving that life against confusion and
distortion." *The Third Millennium: Reflections on Faith and Reason.* Washington, DC:
Georgetown University Press, 1999. p. 50-51

[50] "Gospel and Culture," p. 188

experiences and symbolizations in history,' led Voegelin to nearly abandon the 'leap in being' terminology. This was so chiefly because he wanted to escape the ambiguity…[because] this before/after symbolism is apt to cast a shroud of oblivion on the discoveries which preceded the event."[51]

Certain Christian thinkers found themselves in a predicament after the publication of *The Ecumenic Age* because they believed they had previously found in Voegelin an ally for Christianity and could now only defensively attack Voegelin without considering the relation of this new formulation to their appreciation of his previous work. John Kirby captures the predicament well in a comment on a review of the critical literature:

> Writers generally indicated little interest in Voegelin's philosophy of consciousness, of which his writings on Christ are expressly a part. The tendency to detach certain 'results' from Voegelin's analytical process (in this case results relating to Christianity), and treat them as 'positions' points, finally, to the great shortcoming of all these critics without exception. Not one challenged the theory of noetic and pneumatic differentiations of consciousness that underlay the investigations of *The Ecumenic Age*.[52]

An appreciative Christian analysis of Voegelinian philosophy cannot radically critique Voegelin's use of Greek philosophy without completely undermining his insight into the experience of the ground. As Voegelin notes, "The language of 'equivalences,'…implies the theoretical insight that not the symbols themselves but the constants of engendering experience are the true subject matter of our studies."[53] It is not possible to utilize Voegelin in order to discuss a "new science of politics" which considers the divine movement in history without his development of equivalent symbols. Christian thinkers might be more comfortable with his terminology of compactness and differentiation rather than equivalent

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[51] Morrissey, p. 92

[52] John Kirby, "On Reading Eric Voegelin: A Note on the Critical Literature," in *Voegelin and the Theologian.* ed. Kirby and Thompson, quoted in Morrissey, fn. 13, p. 312

[53] "Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization," p. 115

symbolizations because compactness and differentiation lend themselves more easily to a triumphalist Christian attitude. However, the theoretic basis of compactness and differentiation is one and the same as his formulation of equivalent symbols.

It is worth noticing that Augustine does not share certain Christians' fears of equivalent symbols. Consider Augustine's attitude toward Plato and the Neo-Platonists. Augustine writes, "With a few changes here and there in their words and assertions, [the Platonists] would have become Christians, as indeed several Platonists have done in recent times."[54] While acknowledging the necessity of their conversion, Augustine also points to their close proximity. Even in his later years while reviewing the works from early in his conversion he notes, "We would have to call false that which resembles the true in some way, but that is also something true in its own class." Therefore, he is "rightly displeased" with "the praise with which I extolled Plato or the Platonists or the Academics," but only in so far as it was "beyond what was proper for such irreligious men."[55] Augustine can both acknowledge that experiences symbolized in philosophy are true because they are experiences of God's truth, which leads him to advocate "spoiling the Egyptians,"[56] and insist that Christian doctrine is a superior and necessary differentiation.

Consider also Augustine's famous reflection from the *Confessions* on reading the Platonists:

> In [the books of the Platonist] I read – not, of course, word for work, though the sense was the same and it was supported by all kinds of different arguments – that at the beginning of time the Word already was; and God had the Word abiding with him, and the Word was God. He abode, at the beginning of time, with God. It was through him that all things came into being, and without him came nothing that has come to be. In him there was life, and that life was the light of men. And the light

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[54] Augustine. "True Religion," in *On Christian Belief.* ed. Boniface Ramsey. New York: New City Press, 2005. p. 340

[55] *The Retractions,* p. 10

[56] cf. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, II, 60-63

shines in the darkness, a darkness which was not able to master it…But I did not read in them that the Word was made flesh and came to dwell among us.[57]

Given that Augustine does not seem to take umbrage at the notion of equivalent symbols, what then distinguishes Augustine the theologian from Voegelin the philosopher? The basic difference must be that while Voegelin and Augustine both focus on theophanic events in history, because Augustine concentrates on specific grace, as opposed to common grace, he does not neglect or marginalize the dogma that emerges from these experiences. That is to say that Augustine understands some similarity with the classical understanding of the pneumatic movement as it existed in classical philosophy, but maintains a richer development for Christianity. Therefore, we must examine Augustine's view and use of grace in order to consider its relation to the symbol of *nous* and consider whether Voegelin's approach to Augustine still requires further payment.

Augustine's Differentiation of Grace

The very word "grace" brings a great deal of ambiguity and confusion into our discussion. The very pedestrian nature of the word and the ease with which it fits into conversation masks the difficulties it presents. That is to say, when grace is mentioned, the term is generally understood, but its simplicity covers depths that are rarely plumbed. Our understanding of the term is derived from the Latin "*gratia*," which covers an array of meanings centered on an understanding related to "favor," "kindness," or "blessing." In *Sermon XXVI*, Augustine will also include within the understanding of grace that which is freely given or "*gratis*." When we understand the grace of God as encapsulating everything in creation that is a freely given blessing we can begin to comprehend the difficulties of using the term in general discussion without clear reference to what it pertains. The usage of grace

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[57] *Confessions*, p. 144-45

as referring to salvation of man through the restoration of a right relationship with God is a very particular Christian usage of the term that must be distinguished and not confused with other free blessings of God that he historically and continually bestows upon his creation. Therefore, we must differentiate the symbol of grace before we can assess its equivalence to the symbol *nous*.

Etienne Gilson has marvelously outlined how the Pelagian controversy necessitated Augustine's own differentiation of the concept of grace. Pelagius was so intoxicated with the sense that, for the Christian, everything is grace that, "He absorbs nature almost wholly into grace."[58] Gilson explains, "Pelagius [was] a thorough-going anti-Manichean; and original sin, in his eyes, [was] a relic of Manicheanism; created nature is so wholly good that nothing can be supposed capable of corrupting it to such a point that it will need further grace in addition to that which brought it into existence."[59] Augustine goes to great lengths to demonstrate that the Pelagians have not only neglected sin, but that they have contracted grace in focusing on the graciousness that is common to both pagan and Christian alike to the exclusion of the greater grace by which God separates out His chosen people.

Augustine's differentiation of grace into common and specific elements is clearly seen in *Sermon XXVI* where he argues against these Pelagian ideas. Augustine here reflects at length on the idea that God has made man and not we ourselves. After noting that God has created pagans as well as Christians he reflects on the difference between what is common all humanity and what is specific to Christians. Augustine writes, "Nature should not be treated as grace – but if it may perhaps be reckoned as grace, it's because it too has been bestowed on us *gratis*. After all, man who did not yet exist cannot have had the right to

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[58] Etienne Gilson. *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991. p. 378

[59] Ibid. p. 379

exist."[60] Augustine is willing to acknowledge that the graciousness of God in creation is common to all humanity, and even that all blessings freely given (*gratis*) are part of God's grace, but he desires to stress the importance of specific grace, and so he is critical of too much focus on common grace. Augustine continues:

> It is [God] who made us his people, it is he who made us the sheep of his pasture. He who sent the innocent sheep to be slaughtered, made us sheep out of wolves. That's what grace is. Apart from that common grace of nature by which we who were not were made human beings, and precisely because we were not, didn't deserve to be made; apart from that grace, this is the greater grace, by which we were made his people and the sheep of his pasture, through Jesus Christ our Lord.[61]

Augustine will also use the term "general grace" in this sermon to refer to the common blessings within creation (which must include the sustenance of creation as well as the limiting and restraint of the effects of sin), but while he will acknowledge some limited validity to such a Pelagian notion, he constantly emphasizes the "greater grace" that makes men and women Christians. He states, "Let's admit that that too is a grace by which we were created, though we nowhere read that it is called so; still, because it was given *gratis*, let's allow it to be so. But now let me show you how much greater is this other grace by which we are Christians."[62]

It is in Augustine's constant efforts in this sermon to emphasize the greater importance to Christians of specific grace that holds the explanation for why, though Augustine does have a conception of common grace, he explicitly references it so infrequently. Speaking of the "greater grace," Augustine writes, "We don't share being Christians with the godless. So this grace by which we are Christians, that's what we want to

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[60] Augustine. "Sermon 26" in *Sermons: Vol. 2*. ed. John Rotelle, O.S.A. Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1990. p. 95

[61] Ibid. p. 96

[62] Ibid. p. 99-100

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preach, that's what we want them to recognize, that's the grace we want."[63] Augustine is

clear that, as specific grace is of overwhelming importance, he must be clear on this subject

and emphasize it. Augustine understands that there are implications of the Gospel and a

biblical worldview for human life, and aspects of these implications can theoretically be

shared with those who are not Christians. However, these shared implications clearly are

not what make Christians unique and therefore they are not preached.

For our present purposes it is important to note that Augustine's understanding of

common grace can be extended to include the gracious sustenance of man's mental

capabilities and operation. Therefore, grace, and particularly Christian *sapientia,* can resemble

the philosophical usage of *nous* as a pneumatic movement that all men participate in so far as

we are implicitly or explicitly operating in the sphere of common or general grace. As

Charles Norris Cochrane notes, "Verbally, Augustinian *sapientia* is the exact equivalent of

Plotinian *nous*." Though, Cochrane continues, "For Plotinus, however, the function of *nous*

was to communicate with the One which is beyond knowledge and beyond being, and which

is thus revealed…only in ecstasy. Augustinian *sapientia*, on the other hand, is emphatically

not ecstatic and it presupposes no such detachment from this material world."[64] For

Augustine, *sapientia* contains the grace of understanding that the Christian stands as a

creature before the Creator, who is the "creative and moving principle" of the universe.[65]

Therefore, Augustine clearly depends on specific or salvific grace for the "theoretical

superiority"[66] of Christianity as the fullest expression of the theophanic event whereby

humans attain wisdom.

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[63] Ibid. p. 97
[64] Cochrane, p. 481
[65] Ibid.
[66] *New Science*, p. 80

The Mortgage of the City of God

After considering ways in which Voegelin may have appropriated or been influenced by Augustine, we may take the liberty to inquire if his mortgage to the great Church Father has been paid off. Here I must apologize for playing fast and loose with reference to Voegelin's notion of "a perpetual mortgage of the world-immanent, concrete event on the transcendent truth that on its occasion was revealed."[67] However, if we can understand that Augustine influenced Voegelin toward his later development of the equivalence of philosophy and revelation, in intellectual honesty we should take the next step of investigating whether or not Augustine contains more resources than those appropriated by Voegelin, particularly with regard to doctrine and dogma.

It now seems appropriate to consider in more detail the view of revelation Augustine provides and whether this serves in any way as a corrective to Voegelin or further develops his philosophy. In the *City of God*, Augustine indicatively writes, "With the weakness of understanding common to all mankind, men everywhere presume to resist the clear evidence of truth. If they were to submit that weakness to wholesome doctrine as to a medicine, it would, with divine aid, be healed by the intercession of faith and godliness."[68] In this passage we can note three important features of his understanding of doctrine; namely, the resistance from the noetic effects of sin, the revealed and remedial character of dogma, and his overall dependence on grace.

Noetic Effects of Sin

We can see in the opening of the quotation above that Augustine is concerned with the limits of human reason. He declares, "With the weakness of understanding common to

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[67] *Israel and Revelation*, p. 164

[68] Augustine. *The City of God Against the Pagans.* trans. R.W. Dyson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. p. 51

all mankind, men everywhere presume to resist the clear evidence of truth." This statement

can be summarized as noting what might be called the noetic effects of sin. However, we

must also notice the inverse implication of the statement. If man resists the truth, then he in

some way has already perceived something of the truth. It is from this perspective, as a

philosopher, that Voegelin develops his view of man's existence within the *metaxy*.

However, since he has already approached the borders of theological inquiry, it is fair to

examine if there is anything more that must be appropriated.

Throughout his work, Augustine shows concern for the weakness of the human

mind because of the Fall. This is a concern that finds some relation to Voegelin, but it is not

seen as a radical defect in Voegelin's thinking. Voegelin rather typically thinks in terms of

"deformed reason" which arises from the revolt of systems and ideologies and can be

critically analyzed and overcome.[69] As Mark Mitchell has provocatively outlined, Voegelin

suffers from an epistemological problem in his analysis of man's existence and position

within the *metaxy* because of a limited view of the symbol of the Fall.[70] That is to say, a

philosophical analysis, such as Voegelin's, must appropriate a greater degree from theological

exposition if it is to be completely consistent in its exposition of man's existence. Analyzing

the symbol of the Fall in an Augustinian fashion as a rebellion of ontologically contingent

beings against their non-contingent source, Mitchell writes:

> Due to the volitional act of rebellion, not only was man's ontological (and thus,
> existential) participation in the metaxy fundamentally reoriented, but too, his
> participation within the axiological In-Between was shifted from perfect participation
> in the eternal law to a struggle against opposing inclinations…But, if the metaxy
> suffered radical reorientation due to the Fall, then we must not fail to include the
> noetic dyad in this unfortunate event…this immediately throws us into an

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[69] Vide "Gospel and Culture," p. 178

[70] For a different critique of Voegelin's epistemology cf. Claes Ryn. *Will, Imagination, and Reason.* New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997.

epistemological crisis, for the reliability of the noetic capacity must now be openly questioned.[71]

Mitchell's critique causes definite problems for aspects of Voegelin's philosophical methodology. Particularly, we can have grave doubts about Voegelin's confidence in the philosopher's ability to maintain balance and noetic control over and against some "enthusiastic" pneumatic symbols. Voegelin writes, "The philosopher must be on his guard against…distortion[s] of reality. It becomes his task to preserve the balance between the experienced lastingness and the theophanic events in such a manner that the paradox becomes intelligible as the very structure of existence itself. This task incumbent on the philosopher I shall call the postulate of balance."[72] If man is unmoored within the structure of the *metaxy*, however, the philosopher will not be able to maintain balance without the divine initiative. Also, it is unclear from Voegelin's perspective why the ground would move the unmoored man when man's experience of cosmic (or Divine) justice is considered.[73] These are clearly matters that necessitate a greater degree of theological appropriation. As Mitchell summarizes, "It quickly becomes obvious that Voegelin's solution, which entails regaining the balance of consciousness, is simply impossible, for regaining such a balance implies that *nous* is free to restore that balance that was lost."[74] He continues, "If the philosopher employs *nous* to regain the lost balance, and if *nous* is at war with itself, being pulled simultaneously toward knowledge and ignorance, then we must wonder how *nous* is capable of effecting the restoration."[75] As Augustine noted above, divine revelation is

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[71] Mark Mitchell. "Regaining the Balance: An Augustinian Response to Eric Voegelin." *Humanitas*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2002. p. 20

[72] *Ecumenic Age*, p. 228

[73] Vide Mitchell, p. 9

[74] Ibid. p. 27

[75] Ibid. p. 28

required both to initiate any noetic movement as well as to completely remediate humanity's unmoored existence within the *metaxy*.

It Is Not My Openness

We can now clearly see the climax of the passage as Augustine's complete dependence on grace as undergirding the previous points and all of Augustine's thinking as a theologian. We have seen that man is unmoored within the *metaxy* after the Fall and that revelation offers reorientation in his existence; however, doctrine is not efficacious alone. Even with the revelation of God, Augustine still depends on the continuing work of God for man's salvation and even his very existence. God's operation is particularly required to create man's openness. This reveals a great difference between Augustine's faith and Voegelin's philosophically vague spirituality and also the benefit Augustine provides to Voegelin's reflections of the *metaxy*. While it can be said that, "In Voegelin's mind Christianity seems to be nothing other than a fuller differentiation of life in the *metaxy*,"[76] for Augustine, God's grace provides for the very existence and perception of the *metaxy* and, therefore, considering grace in both is common and salvific aspects provides for the fullest differentiation of man's existence.

Man can only be said to exist within the *metaxy* if the symbol rightly expresses the experience of reality as interplay between the transcendent and man. It is not possible for man to independently create or realize this structure of reality because he is only a man. The further differentiation of the *metaxy* attempts to symbolize two distinct experiences of movement: a divine pull and man's searching. As Michael Morrissey summarizes, "In some experiences of transcendence the accent fall on 'the human seeking-and-receiving pole'; in other experiences the accent fall on 'the divine giving-and-commanding pole…Depending

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[76] Morrissey, p. 14

on which pole is more prominent in the experience, the experience can be designated as either noetic or pneumatic."[77]   Morrissey continues on to explain Voegelin's view of the danger of certain pneumatic experiences and their symbolization. "If the emphasis is on the struggle for truth and reflective illumination, then the experience is under the guise of noetic control and psychic balance will consequently be maintained. If the emphasis is on the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* and its awesome presence, the transcendent force on the soul, although eliciting a spiritual regeneration, can lead to a disabling enthusiasm and noetic distortion."[78]

There are perplexing features of this analysis. While the differentiation of man's existence within the *metaxy* develops into aspects of man's noetic searching for the ground and the ground's pneumatic drawing of man, of necessity, the pneumatic drawing of man must always be chronologically primary for man to experience and symbolize the *metaxy*. Regardless of whether or not men respond or "counterpull" to the divine golden chord,[79] the ground first moves man and creates his existence and openness in the *metaxy*. However, the worry is that if too much emphasis is placed on the pneumatic accent, then although "spiritual regeneration" may occur, "the immediate experience of divine being can evoke uncritical symbols, whereby the metaxic structure of existence is lost or forgotten."[80] It is quite perplexing that a pneumatic movement, which must first occur to open man to the truth of his existence, would bring about "spiritual regeneration" at the same time as creating "uncritical symbols" and "noetic distortion." This is particularly true in light of Voegelin's own acknowledgment that, "The theophanic event itself is not at [man's] command.

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[77] Ibid. p. 85-86
[78] Ibid. p. 86
[79] Vide "Gospel and Culture," p. 185-86
[80] Morrissey, p. 86

Nobody knows why it happens at this particular time in history, why not earlier or later."[81] As man has not created his own openness, it is somewhat peculiar that Voegelin is so concerned that he must protect his openness by avoiding and resisting certain symbols that emerge from the experience of the ground which initially created this openness.

Augustine's Epistemology of Grace

Augustine's own theological view provides a better view of the *metaxy* because it can differentiate grace into common and specific aspects as well as trust in the efficaciousness of dogma. Where Voegelin concentrates on the common drawing of the divine that all men experience in *noesis*, Augustine can also address the specific calling by the divine that accomplishes far more within the individual. This glimpsed in his treatment of epistemology. The important breakthrough of Augustine's epistemological battle against Cicero and the Academics was not simply that the human consciousness connects with the transcendent, but how this connection is part of our very nature and how it is repaired through Christ's accomplished work. B.B. Warfield summarizes the Augustinian view of the epistemological connection of universal and particular:

> Man's power of attaining truth depends, in his view, first of all upon the fact that God has made man like Himself, Whose intellect is the home of the intelligible world, the contents of which may, therefore, be reflected in the human soul; and then, secondly, that God, having so made man, has not left him, deistically, to himself, but continually reflects into his soul the contents of His own eternal and immutable truths which constitute the intelligible world.[82]

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[81] *Ecumenic Age*, p. 217

[82] B. B. Warfield. "Augustine's Doctrine of Knowledge and Authority" in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield, vol. 4: Studies in Tertullian and Augustine.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003. p. 145

Despite the noetic effects of sin as mental, ethical, and volitional hindrances on human life and intellect, God has not abandoned humanity.[83] Augustine reflects that, "The most subtle chain of reasoning would never call back to this intelligible world souls that have been blinded by the manifold shadows of error and rendered forgetful…had not God the Highest, moved…and submitted the authority of the Divine Intellect even to the human body itself."[84] Because God has entered human history, not only through the Incarnation, but also in the continuing work of divine grace, humans have a connection to the transcendent working within their consciousness. He describes God as, "The intelligible Light, in whom and from whom and through whom all things intelligibly shine, which anywhere intelligibly shine."[85] Warfield notes, "[Augustine] thinks rather of the soul as constantly dependent on God, who is no more its Creator than its Upholder and Director."[86] Therefore, man clearly lives within the *metaxy*, and as Augustine writes, "Only some [divine] spirit can show man what the truth is."[87]

Augustine makes the connection personal and intimate by declaring that the impression of the transcendent within the individual person is the voice of Christ that lives within the individual. This doctrine is Augustine's thesis in *The Teacher* and is exposited thus:

> Regarding each of the things we understand, however, we don't consult a speaker who makes sounds outside us, but the Truth that presides within over the mind itself, though perhaps words prompt us to consult him. What is more, He Who is

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[83] "When man sinned, [God] did not permit him to go unpunished, but neither did He abandon him without mercy. To good and evil men alike He gave being, in common with the stones; and He gave life capable of reproducing itself, in common with the trees; and sentient life, in common with the beasts; and intellectual life, in common with the angels alone." DCD, p. 206

[84] Augustine. *Against the Academicians and The Teacher.* trans. Peter King. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1995. p. 91

[85] Augustine. *Soliloquies.* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 3.* ed. Philip Schaff. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004. p. 538

[86] Warfield, p. 143

[87] *The Teacher*, p. 63

consulted, He Who is said to *dwell in the inner man*, does teach: Christ…[Who] every rational soul does consult, but is disclosed to anyone to the extent that he can apprehend it, according to his good or evil will.[88]

Warfield explains, "It was the personal Logos that he had in mind, through whose immanent working all things that exist exist, all things that live live, all things that understand understand."[89] We thus can perceive that "the outcome of this conception is that the condition of all knowledge is revelation."[90] Therefore, every individual is sustained by a divine grace that is common to all mankind; and we can see parallels between Augustine's common grace and the human *nous* of the classical philosopher's that participates in the divine *Nous*.

Beyond the simple parallel, however, there remains more to Augustine's dependence on grace because we have only broached common grace and have not yet exhausted the necessity and potential of specific grace. As with his critique of the Platonists, Augustine also maintains that there is a specific aspect of Christ's grace working in the soul of the faithful that pagan philosophy could not comprehend and which fully illuminates the Christian experiences of order and saves their souls. Without venturing fully into the question of the advantages of being a saint, we can be content to briefly outline something of the philosophical importance of the differentiation of grace and why Christianity was superior to Greek philosophy.

Writing on the tension the Strauss-Voegelin correspondence demonstrates between the two men's conceptions of revelation and philosophy, Fr. Ernest Fortin comes down decidedly against Voegelin and may stand in the place of Leo Strauss as we return to the context which first motivated the discussion of the relation between reason and revelation.

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[88] Ibid. p. 139
[89] Warfield, p. 146
[90] Ibid. p. 147

As Fortin is in agreement with Strauss' argument that philosophy *qua* philosophy cannot be

concerned with such an "intra-Christian problem"[91] as revelation, he connects Voegelin's

approach to revelation and philosophy with the work of the theologian Henri de Lubac, S.J.

and provides this summary of the approach and its problems:

> Lubac's thesis, which as far as I can tell, Voegelin accepts, is that there is no such
> thing as 'an order of pure nature' for the simple reason that the only nature of which
> we have any experience is a nature that has already been elevated to the supernatural
> order. Implied in this statement is a distinction between 'graced' and nongraced'
> nature or between nature in its 'natural' state, so to speak, and nature in its
> 'supernatural' or 'transnatural' state. How the two might differ from each other we
> have no way of knowing save by comparing the them, and this we shall never be able
> to do since we have no access to nature in its original state. What we are finally left
> with is grace and only grace. The trouble is that, if all is grace, nothing is grace.
> Without its correlate, nature, grace simply ceases to be a term of distinction. Using
> that term merely adds a spurious dignity to a discussion that can just as easily be
> carried on without it.[92]

Without intending to, Fortin has quite nicely illuminated the importance of differentiating

grace and how it will enhance Voegelin's philosophy. Fortin is right to note that the human

experience necessarily includes grace;[93] and, left to its own devices, Voegelin's philosophy

may suffer from Fortin's critique. However, Fortin corrective for Voegelin is a renewed

suggestion of Straussian separation and not an Augustinian corrective that maintains we have

a further distinction than just between nature and grace. Augustinian categories first allowed

Voegelin to move beyond Strauss' position, and it is fitting that a further Augustinian

differentiation of grace would allow Voegelin a greater understanding of existence within the

metaxy because it comprehends the corruption of nature, the common grace of creation and

its blessings, and the fullness of human salvation.

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[91] Leo Strauss. "Letter 39," in *Faith and Political Philosophy* p. 89

[92] Ernest Fortin. "Straussian Reflections on the Strauss-Voegelin Correspondence." in
    Classical Christianity and the Political Order. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers,
    1996. p. 332

[93] cf. "One has to assume that something coming from God happens to man." Leo Strauss.
"Letter 39," in *Faith and Political Philosophy* p. 88

Conclusion

The small, though crucial difference, between Augustine and Voegelin lies in Voegelin's more limited differentiation of theophanic experiences of the ground. Augustine the theologian is able to further differentiate theophanic experiences through the differentiation of grace into common and specific elements. While Voegelin does differentiate between noetic and pneumatic experiences, and even shows some connection between the two experiences, as a philosopher he largely relies on noetic experience from hesitation regarding the symbols of doctrine that emerge from particular pneumatic experience. For Augustine the theologian, the dogma that arises from the Christian pneumatic experience is both necessary and trustworthy because it symbolizes what has been (what must have been) accomplished in reality. As a philosopher, Eric Voegelin is faithful to his vocation in his caution in dealing with certain theological formulations, but as he is already approaching theological territory, there are further Augustinian insights that must be appropriated into his philosophy. Theophanic events and experience of the ground can come to all men, but the experience of the ground is not enough for Augustine, specific grace is also required for the fullest noetic understanding and for salvation of the soul.