

Faith Seeking Understanding?

A Response to Stefan Rossbach

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I. Introduction

Stefan Rossbach has presented a critical reconstruction of a possible unity in Eric Voegelin's thought based on a comprehensive knowledge of all the available published and unpublished writings.¹ [1] Having surveyed all the correspondence and notes at Stanford's Hoover Archives, Rossbach shows a detailed and accurate mastery of Voegelin's thought. In an unusual strategy for reconstructing the unity of that thought, Rossbach traced patterns in recurrent "loose ends" or "failures" in Voegelin's work (1-2)--an intriguing approach to an overall assessment of the unity of an author's *oeuvre*. The centerpiece is an outstanding analysis of the role in the evolution of Voegelin's thought of mysticism as grounding a negative theology that, in a *via negativa*, displaces all symbolizations of the divine ground (4-7).

The heart of Rossbach's critical reconstruction is the elaboration of a hypothesis based on René Girard's first significant work of literary criticism (16-18), whose gravamen is the transformation undergone both by some of the great novelists Girard studied in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*,² [2] and

1 [1] See Stefan Rossbach, "'Understanding in Quest of Faith': The Central Problem of Eric Voegelin's Philosophy," (Unpublished typescript, 34 pp.). References to pages are noted in the body of my text.

2 [2] See René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: The Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988). Also René Girard,

by Girard himself in writing it. In some cases there occurred a detached insight into their own self-absorption and a conversion away from the project of self-justification that had pervaded the first drafts of their respective works, enabling them to 'make a clean breast of' their true situation in their revised texts, especially in their conclusions. In the cases of Dostoevsky and Girard, this transformation culminated in a conversion to the Gospel. So Rossbach uses a heuristic hypothesis based on this process to inquire whether a similar transformative process did not occur in Voegelin's thought.

According to Rossbach's reconstruction, when Voegelin uses his *via negativa* as the immunizing dimension of his resistance to untruth, he does so in an ambiguous way (13-15). Rossbach makes a well-researched case that the first volume--*Prometheus*--of Hans Urs von Balthasar's multi-volume work on modern German literature and philosophy inspired the treatment of gnosticism in *The New Science of Politics* (9-10). He investigates the way the concept of gnosticism operated in Voegelin's ongoing resistance to social disorder. He discovers, however, that Voegelin did not base his conceptions either of gnosticism (10-11) or of Christianity (21-24) on sufficient study of the relevant material sources documenting the range of experiences and symbols that are at the heart of his interpretative *modus operandi*. This leads to Rossbach's indictment of Voegelin for violating the methodological canon of selection set forth as early as his first work (1928), *On the Form of the American Mind* (7-11) and elaborated further in *The New Science*.³ [3] He also suggests that the success that started with the expectations raised rather unexpectedly by *The New Science*, and by the paradoxes inherent in having been made something of a "celebrity," affected him, especially in the role that Voegelin's conception

"The Anthropology of the Cross: A Conversation with René Girard," *the Girard Reader*, ed. James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 262-88.

3 [3] Eric Voegelin, *On the Form of the American Mind*, eds. Jürgen Gebhart and Barry Cooper, trans. Ruth Hein (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 5. See, too, *The New Science of Politics in Modernity without Restraint: The Political Religions; The New Science of Politics; and Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, ed. with introduction by Manfred Henningsen, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 109-112. A perhaps more rigorous version of Voegelin's methodological precepts may be found in *Robert B. Heilman and Eric Voegelin. A Friendship in Letters 1944-1984*, ed. with introduction by Charles R. Embry (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 151-3, where Voegelin comments on the method of Heilman's *The Magic in the Web: Action and Language in Othello*.

of gnosticism continued to play thereafter in his career (7-13), not least regarding the fateful correlation between resistance to untruth and prideful self-assertion.

Clearly more significant for Rossbach's proposal than the issue of the correctness of Voegelin's use of gnosticism is his appraisal of the role it played in Voegelin's overall project (13-16). If I have understood it correctly, the argument is that gnosticism (as the antithesis of Voegelin's *via negativa*) functions in his self-understanding as a symbol for all the instances of disorder, deformation, distortion, derailment, and untruth he believes that philosophy must resist, just as his sympathetic friend and reader, Gregor Sebba had said (12). The point here is not just that counter-positions always shape the thinkers who oppose them to a greater or lesser extent. (Think, for instance, of the ways Hegel's thought profiles his great opponents, Kierkegaard and Marx.). Aside from this being no less true of Voegelin, Rossbach contends that Voegelin's use of the concept of gnosticism to oppose the disorder of an age of murderous totalitarianism worked also as a strategy of exclusion and immunization in relation to personal and group disorder or spiritual sickness ("pneumopathology").⁴ [4] Yet just this strategy, according to Rossbach, did not prevent Voegelin himself from being affected by the kind of rigidity and blindness against which he constantly warned. Hence, Rossbach more than suggests that Voegelin's almost obsessive resistance to the disorder of the age turned, by way of a sort of dialectic of humility and pride, into an exercise in self-assertion or self-justification (15-16). (I would only note here that as far as I know, Voegelin's Plato interpretations never mention that the Platonic Socrates's anti-sophist struggle is also rigorously directed against the sophist in himself.)

4 [4] I wonder if the issue of Voegelin and gnosticism pivots on whether it is a phenomenon restricted to Jewish and Christian antiquity early and late, with or without the influence of Zoroastrian dualism; or whether it can justifiably be generalized into a transcultural structure or 'complex' (to use Voegelin's expression) capable of being instantiated empirically by a wide set of phenomena across socio-cultural spaces and times. When Hans Jonas claimed that he recognized gnosticism in his mentor, Martin Heidegger, he acknowledged gnosticism performatively as a transcultural structure. Obviously, Voegelin did this on a grand scale. People's judgments about this issue have seemed to depend on whether they happen to be engaged in scholarship, which is the perspective of those who objected to Voegelin's usage most vehemently; or they are involved in the philosophy of history, which was the concern of Voegelin. Exception was Gregor Sebba, who seems to have worn 'both hats'.

According to Rossbach, self-critical reflectiveness did not effectively emerge in Voegelin until the very late writings (15-16). And only when Voegelin was preparing for his death, he claims, did the relevance of this self-assertive strategy to Voegelin's life-long tussle with Christianity become fully manifest. Moreover, he thinks Voegelin's anti-gnostic strategy is intimately connected to the trouble he often admitted having with adequately coming to terms with the core of Christian faith. For Rossbach, Voegelin's solution in *The Ecumenic Age* to the relationship between philosophy and Christianity "is determined by the framework rather than by a careful consideration of the materials. In other words, [his] treatment of Christianity assumes the form of an 'application' of a system of ideas that pre-existed his scholarly encounter with Christianity (22)."

Rossbach finds that this pattern of letting the heuristic structure determine the results of one's investigations holds sway in Voegelin's assessment not only of Paul's vision but of later Christian doctrines. Because they lack the noetic control of a Plato, Christian thinkers' completion of philosophy becomes liable to gnostic derailments from the very start. However, according to Rossbach's Girard-inspired hypothesis, insofar as Voegelin moved from habitual self-assertion to repentance at the end of his life, the apparent resolution to his ongoing struggle with Christianity at his life's conclusion is another instance of the conversions Girard both discovered and had experienced in authoring *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*.

II. Voegelin and Heidegger Compared and Contrasted

Before being invited to do this response, I had already reflected on many of these issues because two of my friends in Voegelin studies, Geoffrey Price and John Ranieri, were rather alienated by Voegelin on Christianity. Their reasons are quite valid, and they confirm Rossbach's findings from diverse viewpoints. Even my own more piecemeal writing about Eric Voegelin has criticized what seems to me to be (1) his still overly Kantian theory of consciousness with its incorrect notion of cognitive objectivity and of truth, (2) his one-sidedly pejorative account in terms of the inauthentic rigidification, hypostatization, and over-protectiveness of the spiritually immature by the *patres* of the Christian church as they moved gradually from the mythic or symbolic *proteron pros hemas* (first-for-us) expression of the truths by which Christians live to the theoretic *prōton physei* (first by nature or first-in-themselves) articulations in the creeds of the Councils of Nicea (325 AD), Ephesus (431 AD), and Chalcedon (451 AD), and (3) his

misunderstanding of the medieval emergence of theology as a science and of the distinction (not separation) of nature from supernature, along with the cognate distinction between reason and faith. All these criticisms are related to what I believe to be Voegelin's exaggerated emphasis on the mystical dimension of religious experience, which in turn is rooted in what I regard as the inadequacies besetting his foundational couplet of experience and symbolization.

And yet while reading Rossbach on Voegelin and Christianity, I recalled the objections at a Manchester conference organized by Geoffrey Price in the 1990s, repeated like a refrain by Jewish and more rationalist philosophers, social scientists, and specialists in religious studies, about how Voegelin's 'Christian' perspective had distorted his views of ancient Greece, of Plato and Aristotle, of Israelite religion, and of modernity--Jürgen Gebhardt's protests to the contrary notwithstanding.

I was also struck by the contrasting attitudes of Martin Heidegger and Eric Voegelin, respectively, as they prepared for their funerals. Heidegger is said to have summoned one of his faithful disciples, the Catholic priest, Bernhard Welte, to his home in order to request that he preach the eulogy at his funeral mass. When Fr Welte seemed puzzled by this request in view of Heidegger's notorious atheism, Heidegger told him, "Ich habe nie aus der Kirche getreten!" "I have never left the Church!"⁵ [5] In contrast, Voegelin asked the chaplain of Stanford University, the Lutheran New Testament scholar, Robert Hamerton-Kelly, whether he was qualified to have a Christian funeral, and then explained to his wife Lissy that he had chosen the texts from 1 John 2: 15-17 about the lusts that keep one from Christian living "for repentance."

I think the comparison and contrast between Voegelin and Heidegger may cast a different light on this discussion. The trajectory of Voegelin's theory of consciousness from the time of his conversations with

⁵ [5] I heard this story from my Boston College colleague and Heidegger scholar, William J. Richardson, SJ.

Alfred Schütz about the grave limitations of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology propped on egology'⁶ [6] bears similarities to Heidegger's so-called *Kehre*, in which Heidegger freed himself from the limitations of transcendental philosophy in the Kantian mold, in order definitively to reject the priority of the question about knowing, and to recover the question of Being. In Voegelin's case the human being's existence in the tension of the 'in-between', far from putting the human subject 'in the driver's seat' of the search for order, is decisively acknowledged to be at the disposal of a movement of transcendence in and through the person's conscious participation--a movement which at the same time is ultimately beyond human control, and irreducible to any human acts of participation. Unlike Heidegger, he was willing to speak of the finality of that movement in terms of the ground of being and even of God, but that ground is no less mysterious for Voegelin than the Being of beings is for Heidegger.

Again, both thinkers understood themselves as on a mission--Heidegger's, to overcome (n.b.: *Verwinden*, not *überwinden*) the oblivion of Being, and Voegelin's, to recover for practical and political philosophy the classic experience of reason initially articulated by the mystic philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, and further differentiated by Christian experiences and symbols. Far from justifying their being 'apostles of the obvious', this missionary intent seems to have licensed both Heidegger and Voegelin to enact what their academic peers often tend to regard as fanciful and sometimes brutal misinterpretations of classic authors. For example, Hans-Georg Gadamer, the student of Heidegger upon whom he came to rely for help with Greek texts, considered the philology of *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit* ludicrous, and yet he regarded Heidegger's bold and astonishing insights to be epoch-making.⁷ [7] Similarly, a fair amount of Stefan Rossbach's study is devoted to pointing out such things as Voegelin's out-and-out failure to account for the explicit intent of Anselm's *Proslogion* (29-32), and the

6 [6] See Eric Voegelin, "Brief an Alfred Schütz über Edmund Husserl" and "Zur Theorie des Bewusstseins," *Anamnesis. Zur Theorie der Geschichte und Politik* (München: Piper Verlag, 1966), 21-60.

7 [7] See Hans-Georg Gadamer, "III. Heidegger," *Neuere Philosophie, I: Hegel-Husserl-Heidegger*, *Geammelte Werke* 5, (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1987), 175-430. Of this "a) Heideggers Wege," 175-332 has been translated into English: *Heidegger's Way* trans. John W. Stanley (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994).

egregious unreliability, from the philological standpoint, of Voegelin's construction of *metaxy* in the works of Plato (27-8). Nevertheless, most of us take part in discussions sponsored by The Eric Voegelin Society because Voegelin's writings have changed our lives.

As regards the issue of Christian faith, at another crack-of-dawn session of the APSA/Eric Voegelin Society, I compared and contrasted Heidegger's and Voegelin's respective early meditative exegeses of books in Augustine's *Confessiones*. It is relevant for our discussion that in the lectures on Aristotle held the semester immediately following the Augustine *Vorlesungen*, Heidegger intentionally detached Augustine's breakthroughs regarding the performative *esse*, *nosse*, and *velle* that eventually would structure the core of *Sein und Zeit* (1927) from its religious context, in Augustine's text, regarding the eternal Logos who was humbly incarnated to suffer, die, and rise out of love for humankind. Nevertheless, throughout his life Heidegger maintained a private (if rather unorthodox) devotion to the liturgical life of the church both in his hometown Messkirch parish church (where his brother was the sexton), and in the Benedictine community at Beuron.⁸ [8] On the other hand, Voegelin, who started life as a nominally Protestant Christian, was deeply scandalized by the official churches'--both Protestant and Catholic--sellout to Hitler's murderous regime both in Germany and in Austria as documented in *Hitler and the Germans*.⁹ [9] His preoccupation with morality made him clearer than Heidegger about the need for what Gadamer has phrased "the Doric harmony between *logos* and *ergon*."¹⁰ [10] I

8 [8] The information about Heidegger's fidelity to his Messkirch parish comes from both Prof. Roman Siebenrock, Catholic theologian at Innsbruck University, and from the Archbishop of Mainz, Karl Cardinal Lehmann. On Beuron, see Johannes Schaber, OSB, "Phenomenologie und Mönchtum: Max Scheler, Martin Heidegger, Edith Stein und die Erzabtei Beuron," in *Leben, Tod und Entscheidung: Studien zur Geistesgeschichte der Weimarer Republik* [Beiträge zur Politischen Wissenschaft, Bd. 127], eds. Stephan Loos and Holger Zaborowski (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2003), 71-100.

9 [9] Examples are rife in chapters 4 and 5 of *Hitler and the Germans*, translated, edited, and with an introduction by Detlev Clemens and Brendan Purcell (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999).

10 [10] See Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Logos and Ergon in Plato's Lysis," in *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, trans. and introduction P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 1-20 (1).

wonder whether this is why he never fully recovered from the radical disharmony in the instances of institutional Christianity he encountered in his own life. Despite that, Voegelin kept up a link to Augustine that runs like a red thread throughout his scholarly work. It can scarcely be imagined that his choice of the scripture passage from 1 John 2: 15-17 on the lusts of eyes and flesh and pride of life at the end of his life was not motivated at least in part by his early appropriation of Augustine's meditation on that passage in Book X of the *Confessions* in his relatively recently published early explorations on the theory of governance.¹¹ [11]

III. Noetic vs. Pneumatic Differentiations

Roszbach makes the case that Voegelin always "falls back" into collapsing Jewish-Christian pneumatic differentiations of consciousness into the metaxic structure he discovered in Hellenic noesis, thereby effectively rendering the specifically Christian difference moot. While I cannot disagree with the factual basis for this claim, I tend to agree with Glenn Hughes's review of Voegelin's works for *The Political Science Reviewer* (on which I collaborated in a very minor way). The substance of Hughes' interpretation in that review has been lightly revised and reprinted as "Eric Voegelin and Christianity" in the Fall/Winter 2004 issue of *Intercollegiate Review*.¹² [12] Hughes thinks Voegelin understood Christianity, even if he was not fully orthodox (which I would say is true, at least by Roman Catholic standards). How else could Voegelin have written this passage in *The New Science*?

The life of the soul in openness toward God, the waiting, the periods of aridity and dullness, guilt and despondency, contrition and repentance, forsakenness and hope against hope, the

11 [11] See Eric Voegelin, "Notes on Augustine: Time and Memory," *The Theory of Governance and Other Miscellaneous Papers 1921-1938*, translated from the German by Sue Rollans, Jodi Cockerell, M.J. Hanak, Ingrid Heldt, Elizabeth von Lochner, and William Petropoulos; edited with and introduction by William Petropoulos and Gilbert Weiss (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 483-501.

12 [12] Glenn Hughes, "Eric Voegelin and Christianity," (40/1, 2004) *The Intercollegiate Review*, 24-34.

silent strivings of love and grace, trembling on the verge of a certainty which if gained is loss-- the very lightness of this fabric may prove too heavy a burden for men who lust for massively possessive experience.¹³ [13]

This statement appropriates the language common to the tradition of spiritual direction that stretches from the desert fathers to Ruusbroec and Ignatius Loyola. Moreover, it stands in the context of Voegelin's incorporation into *The New Science* of Thomas Aquinas's theological analogy for the supernatural gift of charity in terms of Aristotle's theory of *philia*.¹⁴ [14] Before Thomas, theologians did not use this analogy. They deemed it incompatible with the relationship of love between God and human beings because of the Stagirite's requirement that friendship be between equals. Voegelin's *The New Science* drew from his *History of Political Ideas* such notions as *amicitia Dei* and *fides caritate formata*. In the *History*, Voegelin's perhaps unfair contrast between Calvin's voluntarist notion of grace dominated by absolute divine sovereignty and Aquinas's *fides caritate formata* and *amicitia Dei* reveals nonetheless a genuine appreciation of God's saving intervention in which grace builds on nature.¹⁵ [15]

Rossbach's tough-minded study, however, implies that both in *The Ecumenic Age*'s re-theoretization of grace in terms of the pneumatic differentiation and in essays written after *Order and History III* these ideas are no longer prominent. He contends rightly that it is not enough simply to contrast the noetic differentiation's experience of questing and questioning and the pneumatic differentiation's experience of being drawn by the divine ground of being (21-2); and he lays bare the lack of clarity in the notion of 'vision' in *The Ecumenic Age* and "Wisdom: The Magic of the Extreme" (24-7). But shouldn't the later treatments of the pneumatic differentiation, of 'vision', and of the 'saving tale', which cast the philosopher's noetic differentiation in a relatively favorable light, be weighed in view of the mature

13 [13] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics in Modernity without Restraint*, 187-8.

14 [14] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics in Modernity without Restraint*, 150.

15 [15] See Eric Voegelin, "The Great Confusion I: Luther and Calvin," *The History of Political Ideas IV: Renaissance and Reformation*, eds. David L. Morse and William M. Thompson (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 217- 91.

Voegelin's increasingly nuanced grasp of the dangers of the apocalypticism that generates both ancient gnosticism's strategy of "Stop-the-world, I-want-to-get-off!" and the modern progressive, positivist, and Marxist gnostics' determination to transform the world in accord with utopian dreams? Can this awareness simply be put down to an impulse to justify himself? Moreover, may not Voegelin's apparent way of regarding the pneumatic vis-à-vis the noetic differentiation perhaps be rooted less in a devaluation of the former than in a conviction that the classic experience of the noetic differentiation has more in common with genuine cases of the pneumatic differentiation than with more recent concepts of reason?

Then, too, I believe Voegelin felt that his personal experiences and historical research did not exactly bolster the sense that the pneumatic differentiation could regularly provide sufficient protection for civilization against the derailments of human existence into untruth. Recall the following indictment in *From Enlightenment to Revolution*:

❖ The Church is losing its leadership, not only the leadership of the civilizational process itself, but the leadership of the spirit....

The Church has abandoned its spiritual leadership insofar as it has left postmedieval man without guidance in his endeavors to find meaning in a complex civilization, which differs profoundly in its horizons of reason, nature and history from the ancient that was absorbed and penetrated by the early Church. In the face of this abandonment of the *magisterium* it is futile when Christian thinkers accuse the *superbia* of modern man who will not submit to the authority of the Church. There is always enough *superbia* in man to bolster the accusation plausibly, but the complaint dodges the real issue: that man in search of authority cannot find it in the Church, through no fault of his own.¹⁶ [16]

16 [16] See Eric Voegelin, "The Emergence of Secularized History: Bossuet and Voltaire," ❖ *From Enlightenment to Revolution*, ed. John H. Hallowell (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1975), 21, 23.

The scandal of seeing nominal Christians hold conventional religious or ethnic identity more important than the humanity of the Jews in the Hitler years¹⁷ [17] may have been a part of Voegelin's motivation for conceiving the engendering mystical experience in general as the heart of the search for the meaning of existence, whether in Athens, Jerusalem, or Rome, to speak symbolically. Think of how the symbolization of this experience traded on the double meaning of life and death; and that this inner experience occurs in the field of pulls and counter-pulls symbolized in Plato's *Laws* by the chords of the puppets or in the *Phaedrus* by the reins of chariot horses, and in the *Republic* by the being pulled out of the cave to the *periagoge* of conversion.¹⁸ [18] This is integral to his firm refusal to identify the reason of Plato and Aristotle with the deductive metaphysical or theological reasoning of the medieval scholastics, 17th and 18th century rationalism, or 19th century idealism. Didn't the *The World of the Polis* and *Plato and Aristotle* show that the primordially moral and religious character of the Hellenic noetic differentiation parallels the pneumatic experiences that characterize the break from cosmological symbolizations in *Israel and Revelation*? No wonder, then, that "The Gospel and Culture" reaffirmed Justin Martyr's judgment that the gospel brings philosophy to its perfection.¹⁹ [19]

From this perspective, I would say that the basic idea of Voegelin's anthropology is expressed in his lecture, "In Search of Ground":

What is this nature of man that is briefly formulated as 'the life of reason'? For expressing the life of reason we have quite a vocabulary already developed by the classic philosophers, which

¹⁷ [17] Besides chapters 4 and 5 of *Hitler and the Germans*, the instance that sticks in my mind is that of Pastor Martin Niemöller in "The German University and the Order of German Society: A Reconsideration of the Nazi Era," *Published Essays 1966-1985*, edited with an introduction by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 1-35 (10-12).

¹⁸ [18] See especially Eric Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture," *Published Essays 1966-1985*, 172-212.

¹⁹ [19] Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture," *Published Essays 1966-1985*, 173.

in part is identical with the Christian vocabulary and has remained constant throughout the history of mankind❖

The Ground of existence is an experienced reality of a transcendent nature toward which one lives in a tension. Already Heraclitus knew three variants or nuances of the tension: love, hope, and faith [cf. OH II:228 f.]. Where love toward the Divine Being is experienced; where hope for fulfillment in relation to such a Being is experienced as the point of orientation in life; where these experiences are present there is that openness of soul in existence that is an orienting center in the life of man.

IV. Mystical Experience vis-❖-vis Doctrine

Against the background of modern dogmatomachy, therefore, Voegelin found an alternative to religious persecution and wars of religion in Jean Bodin's expedient of going beyond opponents' launching of right doctrinal propositions against wrong doctrinal propositions to a preconceptual, prepredicative, religious experience that cannot be confined to the conventional boundaries of churches, sects, or faith-traditions.²⁰ [20] Exploiting insights drawn from the Neoplatonist theology of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite,²¹ [21] Voegelin held that mysticism or religious experience orients one immediately to the divine ground of being. As Voegelin stated in the passage immediately following the one just quoted from the lecture, "In Search of the Ground❖:

The vocabulary of love, hope, and faith has remained in St Paul: the Letter to the Romans, for example, has those three names for the tension experienced. They are summarized in that openness of the soul that Saint Augustine has called *amor Dei* [the love of God] or that Bergson in his *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* has called the openness of the soul towards transcendence--which means openness toward the Ground of existence, because we all

20 [20] See Eric Voegelin, "Was ist Politische Realit❖t❖❖ *Anamnesis*, 335-38, 380 .

21 [21] See Eric Voegelin, "Was ist Politische Realit❖t❖❖ *Anamnesis*, 335-39, 380.

experience our own existence as not existing out of itself but as coming from somewhere even if we don't know from where.²² [22]

Consequently, even after he had distinguished the pneumatic from the noetic differentiation, Voegelin habitually likened Aristotle's noetic choice of the means in relation to the love of the highest good to Augustine's "love of God above all things, even to the contempt of self." What is extraordinary in relation to Rossbach's claims, aside from the obvious structural similarity between the two forms of differentiation, is Voegelin's acknowledgment of the *gift-character* in both the Hellenic and the Christian cases.

Now, if one compares Voegelin's Heraclitus interpretation just referred to with Gadamer's, one may well suspect that Gadamer probably succeeded in understanding Heraclitus "as he understood himself" more than Voegelin did.²³ [23] But that does not mean that Voegelin's account is without value, because even if his interpretation of Heraclitus is not entirely reliable, he provides a helpful analysis of reality. Again, Voegelin's correspondence with fellow political philosopher and student of Plato and Aristotle, Leo Strauss, reveals how controversial Voegelin's interpretation of the Greeks can be considered.²⁴ [24] Voegelin might have been willing to concede a distinction between philosophy and faith, but he did not think there could be a separation; Strauss, on the contrary wanted to demonstrate that there is a separation or contradiction between the two. Strauss gives the impression of anachronistically attributing to the noesis of Plato and Aristotle the rationalism of Spinoza's *amor Dei intellectualis* with its overwhelming stress on necessity and self-evidence as the criteria for objectivity and intellectual honesty. Strauss supposes philosophy is to replace opinions about the whole with scientific knowledge of the whole in accord with the logical requirements for *episteme* prescribed by the *Posterior Analytics*, even though he frankly concedes that in fact it does no more than establish "what

²² [22] See Eric Voegelin, "In Search of the Ground," *Published Essays 1953-1965*, edited with an introduction of Ellis Sandoz (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 2000), 224-251 (230).

²³ [23] See Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Tradition of Heraclitus" and "Heraclitus Studies," *The Beginning of Knowledge*, trans. Rod Coleman (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2001), 21-81.

²⁴ [24] See *Faith and Political Philosophy. The Correspondence Between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934-1964*, translated and edited by Peter Emberley and Barry Cooper (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

the actual questions and their rank of priority are;25 [25] philosophy begins for Voegelin from what (in the Strauss correspondence) he calls "the pregivens of perception" that are not accessible to *episteme/scientia* but can be apprehended only by *sophia/sapientia*.26 [26] This latter distinction is roughly equivalent to what may be found in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI, but Voegelin anachronistically interprets Aristotle's distinction between science and wisdom rather in terms of Augustine!

So Voegelin starts from a pre-perceptual, pre-conceptual, and pre-judgmental experience--i.e., mysticism--the foundational knowledge by which people live their lives. This primordial basis leads him to write later on that noesis is a "meditative problem" that

From the one side, namely, from the human, the search can be accentuated. I would call that the noetic posture. From the other side, the revelatory side, one can emphasize the motivational factor. I would call that the pneumatic position. Both are present in the problem of meditation. The tension exists between the being moved from the godly side and the search from the human side. Thus, the godly and the human sides are assumed in a process of seeking and being moved to seek.27 [27]

More a matter of consciousness than of knowledge, mysticism for Voegelin, then, is really a love of the divine ground; faith is the illumination of intelligence by love, as in Thomas Aquinas's phrase (much favored by Voegelin), *fides caritate formata*. People experience their existence within the limits of life and death, and encounter "the wondering question about the ultimate ground, the *aitia* or the *prote*

25 [25] Leo Strauss, "Letter 39, June 4. 1951," *Faith and Political Philosophy*, 90.

26 [26] Eric Voegelin, "Letter 38, April 22, 1951, *Faith and Political Philosophy*, 83.

27 [27] See Eric Voegelin, "The Meditative Origin of the Philosophical Knowledge of Order," *The Drama of Humanity and Other Miscellaneous Papers, 1939-1985*, edited with and introduction by William Petropoulos and Gilbert Weiss (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 389.

arche, of all reality and specifically (their) own.28 [28] To be sure, he does not suggest that what human beings are fit for is worship and praise and thanksgiving. Clearly, the most choiceworthy human activity for him is reading the classic texts in pursuit of the truth of existence. He understands this enterprise as *fides quaerens intellectum*.29 [29]

V. Conclusion: Notes of a Catholic Theologian

Here we arrive at what is perhaps the real crux of Rossbach's paper. Voegelin's mature understanding of what in *The New Science* he called the soteriological truth³⁰ [30] is remarkably close to the Catholic Christian teaching, which was clarified when the church declared as heretical the opinion that *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the church there is no salvation) in excommunicating the Boston Jesuit, Leonard Feeney. (About Feeney, Fr Lonergan once joked that he left the church rather than give up his conviction that outside the church there is no salvation.) In terms of Christian theology this means that, because of the mission of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is sent (i.e. offered) to *all* human beings. Voegelin's agreement with the Catholic universalist doctrine that God wills all human beings to be saved comes out clearly in his appreciation for Thomas Aquinas's teaching on the whole Christ,³¹ the *corpus Christi mysticum*.³¹ [31] And, indeed, his account of mysticism provides a plausible explanation of how the potential inclusion of all humankind in the body of Christ can be true for sincerely seeking people outside the fold of the Christian churches.

28 [28] See Eric Voegelin, "Reason: the Classic Experience," *Published Essays 1966-1985*, 268.

29 [29] See Eric Voegelin, "Response to Professor Altizer's 'A New History and a New but Ancient God'," *Published Essays 1966-1985*, 292-303.

30 [30] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics in Modernity without Restraint*, 150-51, 185, 196, 204.

31 [31] See Thomas Aquinas, "Is Christ the Head of All Men?" *Summa theologiae* III, q. 8, a.3, to which Voegelin refers in "Eric Voegelin to Alfred Schutz, I [On Christianity]," *The Philosophy of Order. Essays on History, Consciousness and Politics*, eds. Peter J. Opitz and Gregor Sebba (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 449-57 (457).

Yet Voegelin upset many Christians, and perhaps especially such Catholic Christians as Gerhart Niemeyer and Frederick Wilhelmsen, both because his polemical rhetoric seems to exaggerate the non-thematic character of mystical experience (or, in traditional terms, *fides implicita*) in such a way as to relativize all doctrine; and because he does not understand correctly the doctrine (forged in the conciliar movement from Nicea through Ephesus to Chalcedon) concerning the relationship between divine and human natures in the 'one and the same' person of Jesus Christ. This misunderstanding rests on Voegelin's mistaken idea that doctrinization must entail inauthentic hypostatizing of what can only authentically be a symbolization of an experience of mystery. As regards Nicea, the eminent German *Patristiker* and scholar of the conciliar controversies, Alois Grillmeier, wrote:

If we want to use a label like "the Hellenization of the Christian faith," we can see from this dispute where it really applies. It does not apply to the bishops of the council of Nicea (325) who rejected Arius' teaching. The fathers of the council used a term which fits very well into Greek philosophy, *homoousios*, identical in substance, consubstantial. But far from implying acceptance of Greek philosophy, their use of this term was a direct attack on it. They used it to stress the very point which no Greek philosopher would ever have conceived of, the true divinity of the Son and his begetting--not creation--by the Father. The council of Nicea chose the *difficilior lectio* of the Christian message. It resisted the temptation to adopt Arius' theory, although it was philosophically more plausible.³² [32]

About the Chalcedonian formula Grillmeier stated:

71-100.

32 [32] See Alois Grillmeier, "God's divinity and humanity," in *The Common Catechism* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 232-261 at 241.

[T]he council of Chalcedon canonized no metaphysical "theory of Christ.❖ Still less did it leave any room for mythological ideas. The whole "formalistic❖ style of the fathers' definitions, far from making the mystery manageable, emphasizes its difficulty. The council doesn't give us an answer to the question, "Who is Jesus Christ?❖ It gives us instructions about how to think and talk. Whether we go into further metaphysical questions or not, we are required to resist oversimplifications and always to describe the man Jesus in such a way that God is clearly visible in his humanity, and always to describe the eternal Son of God in such a way that he has the features of the man Jesus of Nazareth.³³ [33]

In my memory (I have not had time to check on this), both Niemeyer and Wilhelmsen, like many Catholics, seem to affirm about the authoritative teachings on the Incarnation precisely what Grillmeier roundly denies--namely, the stress on the role of metaphysics in articulating the doctrines. But the conciliar process of 'doctrinization' offers us not metaphysics, but rather a logically controlled way of transposing the affirmations of Scripture into a transcultural theological framework. Voegelin seems to have shared Niemeyer's and Wilhelmsen's misunderstanding of the conciliar achievement. But I do not think it can be apodictically stated that Voegelin denies the sense of the conciliar teachings as constructed by Grillmeier (in the citations above), insofar as they "gather the sense of the Scriptures❖ and use new language to answer questions not yet raised in the context of the Scriptures. Misunderstanding what the council fathers intended, however, Voegelin preferred to stay closer to the statements of John and Paul in "The Gospel and Culture❖ and in *The Ecumenic Age*.

This brings us to the issue of Voegelin's pride, and his alleged unwillingness to engage with full openness the range of materials presented by the Christian experience, symbols, and institutions. In response to Alfred Sch❖tz's query about why, as a philosopher, Voegelin paid so much attention to Christianity in *The New Science*, he replied, "As a theoretician of politics I have no choice in this matter; these questions arise in the historical material, and I have to come to grips with them

³³ [33] Grillmeier, "God's divinity and humanity,❖ 258.

34 [34] Voegelin's account of Christianity in his letter to Schutz contrasts two versions of that religion, one based on the gnosis of historical eschatology (reflecting the modern historical-critical emphasis on first century Palestinian apocalypticism as the background of Jesus³⁵ [35]), and a second that he calls "essential Christianity", which roughly corresponds to the Catholic view of the church.³⁶ [36] Voegelin's letter proceeds to list the genuine Christian contributions, including (A) Christology (but not the uncritical version of Catholic orthodoxy); (B) the Trinity, which encompasses symbolizations of (1) experiences of radical transcendence, (2) experiences of divine intervention/transformation by supernatural grace, and (3) experiences of "the presence of the spirit in the community of the faithful"; and (C) Mariology, marking "the end of superhuman vessels of the divine" (as in left-wing Puritanism). This is followed by an appreciation of "the critical understanding of theological speculation and its meaning, attained above all by Dionysius Areopagita and Thomas Aquinas, namely, of analogical understanding and dogma in theology. In conclusion, he conceded that he possessed what Catholics at that time would construe as a Modernist understanding of 'church'--a way of thinking about the church which he believed was congruent with the teaching of Thomas Aquinas in the *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa theologiae*.

34 [34] See "Eric Voegelin to Alfred Schutz, I [On Christianity], *The Philosophy of Order*, 449-57 (451): "Essentially my concern with Christianity has no religious grounds at all. It is simply that the traditional treatment of the history of philosophy and particularly of political ideas recognizes antiquity and modernity, while 1500 years of Christian thought and Christian politics are treated as a kind of hole in the evolution of philosophy. As I worked on my 'History', this approach turned out to be impossible (449).

35 [35] The historical critical school of New Testament studies from Reimarus to Schweitzer went hand-in-hand with what Karl Barth called the *Kulturprotestantismus* he ascribed to liberal Protestants such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Adolf von Harnack, Albrecht Ritschl, and Wilhelm Hermann. The school was born in Göttingen in the 1890s, and included A. Eichorn, H. Gunkel, W. Bousset, J. Weiss, and W. Wrede. As far as historical knowledge of Jesus is concerned, the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*³⁵ [35] and post-Bultmannian biblical studies oscillated between Wilhelm Wrede's "thoroughgoing skepticism" and Albert Schweitzer's "thoroughgoing eschatology." See N.T. Wright, "The 'Quests' and Their Usefulness," *The Contemporary Quest for Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 1-22; see, too, Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1986*, Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), especially the updating chapter added to this edition by Tom Wright, "History and Theology", 360-449.

36 [36] Voegelin, "[On Christianity]", 452-3.

Significantly, in the midst of this explanation of his concern with Christianity, he criticized Henri Bergson for not daring to "enter into the problem of grace.❖

Now this lengthy and fairly comprehensive reply to Sch❖tz on Christianity was prefaced by a balanced, as opposed to an irrationalist, understanding of the "problem of the *sacrificium intellectus*.❖ Here is the gist of this discussion:

In the 19th-century atmosphere of liberal editorializing, the sacrifice of the intellect was understood as an abdication of reason through the acceptance of dogma. But this is not how it was understood from Athanasius through Kant. For Athanasius *sacrificium intellectus* signifies the obligation not to operate with the human intellect in regions not accessible to it, i.e. in the regions of faith. This discussion is aimed at the gnostics of Athanasius' time, who, as Irenaeus put it, want to read from God as they read from a book.³⁷ [37]

A page later he goes on to tell Sch❖tz: "As to ❖intellectual discipline,' it does not consist in a philosopher's building with the utmost intellectual discipline a rigorous system based on false premises; it consists in making the *sacrificium intellectus* and not making the false premises.❖³⁸ [38] The point to the sacrifice as intellectual discipline, therefore, is that one must not talk about what one does not know about; and one should be willing to learn from revelation things that surpass the capacity of human reason to understand and judge on its own. This means one ought to *believe* what is revealed, and *only then* try to understand the mysteries believed--by using analogies. Voegelin more than implies his willingness to make this sacrifice of his intellect.

The question arises here about the scholarly legitimacy of drawing conclusions from private letters and second-hand anecdotes. I will say only that this portion of the Sch❖tz correspondence was published while Voegelin was alive in a volume honoring his 80th birthday, so we can assume that, as

37 [37] Voegelin, "[On Christianity]❖, 451.

38 [38] Voegelin, "[On Christianity]❖, 452.

in the case of *Anamnesis*, he was happy for this hitherto unpublished part of the Schelling exchange to be published. Based on this evidence, then, I suggest in conclusion that whereas Rossbach infers from the data he presented that until the very end of his life Voegelin was unwilling to submit to the materials of Christian experience, symbols, and institutions, I want to ask whether it is possible that the problems Rossbach uncovered may be accounted for by a somewhat different account. Here is my alternative hypothesis.

Already in this letter to Schelling, Voegelin, for the sake of clear communication, spontaneously interpreted Thomas Aquinas's understanding of analogy in terms of his usual scheme of experience and symbolization, rather than make clear to Schelling that analogy as employed by Aquinas is not just a symbol or metaphor, but sets up a controlled proportion between nature and supernature based on an explanatory (theoretical/scientific--at least in the way Aquinas understood Aristotle to have achieved) understanding of a reality proportionate to our capacity to understand it. It never claims to prove the truth of the doctrines, for that is already believed; instead it offers only *rationes convenientiae*--possibly relevant understandings or, as we would say, hypotheses.

Had he followed Thomas's lead on analogical understanding more faithfully, Voegelin might, for example, have handled a particular theoretical problem which is crucial to our discussion and that he never properly engaged, namely, the difference between reason as rightly identified by him with Aquinas's *lumen naturale* (which Aquinas says is a created participation in uncreated light), on the one hand, and the supernatural *lumen fidei*, which is a gift that goes beyond what God grants us by nature. I believe that, for the reasons I have suggested in the preceding sections, Voegelin instead conflated the gift of created nature with the gift of God's love, which is not proportionate to human beings by nature, but is proper to his onlybegotten Son alone. This love is the Holy Spirit. Thus, in the end, like Bergson, he thereby failed to do justice to those specifically Christian achievements he himself had listed for Schelling.

Nevertheless, it remains for me all the more astonishing that Voegelin's commitment to faith, hope, and love as the starting point for philosophy attained its fullest clarity in his frequent references to a passage

in St Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 64(65)39 [39] depicting the liberation of the human race through divine grace from the disorientation and cupidity due to sin:

Incipit exire qui incipit amare.

Exeunt enim multi latenter,

et exeuntium pedes sunt cordis affectus;

exeunt autem de Babylonia.

The first verse of the Psalm begins, *In finem, psalmus David, canticum Ieremiae et Ezechielis, ex populo transmigrationis, cum inciperent exire*. In the series of Old Testament exoduses (of Abraham from the Chaldees, of Moses from the 'house of carnage' in Egypt), Augustine refers to the exodus of Israel and Judah from the Babylonian exile and their return to Jerusalem. Augustine says Babylon stands for confusion, which Voegelin interprets as disoriented self-love. Jerusalem, to which the one leaving Babylon is returning, is the true goal of the quest for happiness, the *beata visio*, the *beata vita*, moved toward by abandoning the love of self and turning towards the love of God.

Voegelin claimed that this religious allegory from Augustine's *On the Psalms* is equivalent to a compact philosophy of history. He understands that the key to the passage is not simply forgiveness and instruction in goodness, but a gratuity that does not depend on prior human choice or performance, and an efficacy that supports us from the time of our conversion until our final salvation.

He begins to leave who begins to love.

39 [39] Eric Voegelin's analysis of Augustine's passage in *On the Psalms* 64(65).2 occurs in the essays "Immortality: Experience and Symbol," *Published Essays 1966-1985*, 52-94 (78) and "Configurations of History," *Published Essays 1966-1985*, 104-6.

Many the leaving who know it not,

for the feet of those leaving are affections of the heart:

and yet, they are leaving Babylon . . .
