Voegelin on Aristotle's "Science of the Polis"

In his 1951 Walgreen lectures published as the *New Science of Politics*, Eric Voegelin calls for the restoration of political science as a science of order. This restoration is necessary because political science has fallen into degenerate state as a Weberian, value-free social science concerned with "objective, value-free" measures of political phenomenon. Political science as a genuine science of order should be grounded on an interpretation of political societies' symbols though which these societies interpret their connexion to a transcendent truth. In the *New Science of Politics*, Voegelin both describes what would be necessary for a restoration of political science and models it in his analyses of contemporary political societies and the state of our understanding of the order of these societies. He describes his own method as "substantially the Aristotelian procedure" (*NSP* 31, cf. 52) and reminds us that political science was initiated by Plato and Aristotle (*NSP* 1,2). 1 [1]

This raises the question of what about a restored political science would be "Aristotelian"--and Voegelin's remark about his own procedure just quoted suggests that it has something to do with method or procedure. Certainly, Voegelin is emphatic that a contemporary political science cannot be Platonic or Aristotelian in content:

> One cannot restore political science today through Platonism, Augustinianism, or Hegelianism. Much can be learned, to be sure, from the earlier philosophers concerning the range of problems, as well as concerning their theoretical treatment; but the very historicity of human existence, that is, the unfolding of the typical in meaningful concreteness, precludes a valid reformulation of principles through return to a former concreteness. Hence, political science cannot be restored to the dignity of a theoretical science in the strict sense by means of a literary renaissance of philosophical achievements of the past; the principles must be regained by a work of theoretization which starts from the concrete, historical situation of the age, taking into account the full amplitude of our empirical knowledge (*NSP* 3).

---

1 [1] In my parenthetic citations of Voegelin's works, I use the following abbreviations: *FPP* for Letter 4 in *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin*, *NL* for "On the Nature of Law," *NSP* for *New Science of Politics*, and *PA* for *Order and History, volume III: Plato and Aristotle*.

Moreover, Voegelin is clear that that Plato's and Aristotle's political science is inadequate to the ecumenical political science at which Voegelin aims: "The Platonic-Aristotelian man is the man of the polis and is, even for Aristotle, tied to the *omphalos* of Delphi; precisely from the Hellenic position, a universal political science is radically impossible" (*FPP* 9). Plato and Aristotle are unaware of history as the unfolding of consciousness that is so important to Voegelin's thought. Christianity, through its catholic aspiration to encompass all men, and the discovery of history, which revealed the ongoing development of men's attempts to articulate and then to represent in language and in society the relation of man to the divine, have rendered Platonic-Aristotelian political science obsolete.

Yet, although he is clear that Aristotle's political science is inadequate in content and in scope to a valid contemporary political science, Voegelin describes his own method as "Aristotelian." In this paper I examine Voegelin's account of the method of Aristotle's political science with a view to understand of how this method is suitable to Voegelin's political science. Because I will focus on Voegelin's account of Aristotle's method, will be obliged to forgo discussion of many interesting details of Voegelin's interpretation of the arguments of the *Politics* and I will pay particular attention to Voegelin's account of how Aristotle's political science emerges in response to Plato's political science. I argue that Voegelin found in Aristotle a model of empirical political science that encompasses two distinct but mutually informing kinds of inquiry that together form the basis for a political science as a science of order: the development of standards by which actual political societies may be studied and the investigation of actual political societies.2 [2] Both of these are inquires are empirical. The standards by which societies are analyzed are developed only by attending to symbols that articulate a society's connexion to a reality above and beyond that society; these symbols and the institutions and practices of actual political societies under investigation are phenomena in reality. Voegelin's empirical political science is Aristotelian in its distinctive combination of development of standards and application of standards to political phenomenon. In addition to a very similar method, Voegelin's and Aristotle's political science share the motive of being responses to civilizational crises: Voegelin's political science analyzes the crisis brought about by the emergence of totalitarian

---

2 [2] Neither the description of Voegelin as an empirical political scientist--empirical understood in a broad sense--nor connecting Voegelin's empiricism to Aristotle's is novel. See, for example, Cooper (1999) and Ranieri (1999, esp. 38-39). Cooper distinguishes three meanings of empirical or experiential political science: skill in discernment that comes from practice, intellectual discrimination that makes possible the establishment of general criteria for a kind of speech, science, or theory, and meditative exegesis on consciousness itself. While agreeing with Cooper that the "core of Voegelin's empirical political science" is the third of these three, I focus on the second of these as it is this part of Voegelin's political science that is concerned with the political societies (the political in the most usual sense) rather than with consciousness (and the political as an experience of consciousness).

regimes within the West, as Aristotle's analyzed the Hellenic crisis brought about the collapse of the polis as a viable political unit that would be replaced by Macedonian empire.

In the next pages, I describe Voegelin's account of the development of Aristotle's political science in response to Plato's political science, and then survey the division of Aristotle's political science into a philosophic anthropology and a nomothetic science. I point out various ways in which Voegelin's reading of Aristotle contrasts with our contemporaries that are especially illuminating. I then return to consider briefly Voegelin's own empirical political science and its Aristotelian character.

Aristotle's response to Plato's Science of Politics:

"The Platonic-Aristotelian Problem"

Voegelin's account of Aristotle's political science begins with the biographical note that Aristotle was introduced to philosophy as a way of life and to Plato's science of politics as a member of Plato's Academy during the last two decades of Plato's life, during which Plato composed his late political dialogues the *Statesman* and the *Laws*. The symbols that were still under active development in Plato's work were the basis for discussion and critique, and for the elaboration of set of problems about man and his relation to the cosmic order. As Voegelin describes in the first part of his *Plato and Aristotle* volume, there were significant changes in Plato's mythic accounts of man and the polis that would have certainly sparked critical evaluation among members of the Academy. Therefore, Voegelin writes, "The Academy was not an institutions for the transmission of textbook knowledge; at its core was a group of highly active scholars concerned with the development of problems. For twenty years Aristotle was a member of this group" (*PA* 273-74).

Constant, however, among the changes in Plato's image of man and the polis, and therefore a foundational assumption of scholars in the Academy, is the principle that that the order of men's souls and of the polis are images of one another. Voegelin calls this Plato's "anthropological principle." For Plato, this principles holds for degenerate men and cities--as for example, in the discussion of disordered men and cities in *Republic VI and VII*--as well as for rightly ordered ones. Rightly ordered souls and poleis will also be images of the true order of the cosmos, so that the good polis will be "not only a microcosmos but also a macroanthropos." In Plato's work this anthropological principle is both "a general principle for interpretation of society" and "an instrument of social critique" (*NSP* 61). The anthropological principle implies that political science's scope is not limited to analysis of political communities, institutions, and practices but also must include a philosophic anthropology.

Voegelin argues that Aristotle's political science is also begins from this anthropological principle inherited from Plato. Voegelin writes, "the Aristotelian construction…on the whole is faithful to the Platonic anthropological principle" (*PA* 313, see also 295, 323). Thus for both Plato and Aristotle, the central political problem is defining the good man, describing the good polis that corresponds to the good man, and further understanding how both the good man and the corresponding good polis participate in the cosmic order above and beyond the polis. So, Voegelin writes, "while the answers of [Aristotle's] late work differed widely form those of Plato and of his co-disciples Speusippus and Xenocrates, they were answers to problems of the Platonic circle" (*PA* 274). Because of Aristotle's inheritance from Plato of this set of problems and of a mode of addressing these questions, Voegelin writes of a "Platonic-Aristotelian problem" and a "Platonic-Aristotelian idea of science" in a letter to Leo Strauss about the basis for a empirical science of politics (*FPP* 8-9).

Aristotle's response to Plato's Science of Politics:

A New Aristotelian Science of Politics

However, while there is, on Voegelin's view, a "Platonic-Aristotelian problem" and "Platonic-Aristotelian idea of science," there is no "Platonic-Aristotelian science" of politics. In Voegelin's letter to Strauss, Voegelin immediately turns from naming the "Platonic-Aristotelian problem" to differentiating Plato's political science from Aristotle's: "At the center of Platonic political thinking stand the *fundamental experiences*, which are tied together with the person and death of Socrates--catharsis through consciousness of death and the enthusiasm of eros both pave the way for the right ordering of the soul (*Dike*)" (*FPP* 8, emphasis in original, see also *PA* 13-14, 272). On the basis of these fundamental experiences, Plato developed the Idea of the Good as the basis for a rightly ordered soul. Since the anthropological principle implied that this right order of soul should find its image in the polis, Plato was then able to diagnosis the disorder in Hellenic society. As Plato understood "society as a compactly integrated unit of political, educational, and religious institutions" (*PA* 288), this diagnosis implied a total reform of Hellenic society to accord with the Idea by Plato's own "theocratic will to achieve the impossible and to restore the bond between spirit and power" (*PA* 289). So, Voegelin writes, "Plato experienced himself as the inaugurator and royal ruler of the new age; his evolution could be traced from the suspense of the *Republic*, apprehending that the spiritual foundation would overflow into historical reality and transform Hellas, to the *Laws*, where the expectation of a new realm was transfigured into the two cosmic symbols of the polis that was the subject matter of the work and of the form of the work itself" (*PA* 284).

Aristotle did not--could not--share Plato's science of politics. It had become apparent that there would be no transformation of the polis but rather that the polis was about to be superceded by other, larger units--and ultimately by Alexander's empire which would power from Hellas to Macedonia. Therefore, Aristotle' political science cannot aim at inaugurating a new Hellenic age but rather is a political science that has "given up" on this attempt and seeks only to make for the best polis under the circumstances (*PA* 289, see also 312). Closely connected with Aristotle's giving up on the notion of reforming Hellenic poleis is his appreciation of the fact that political, educational, and religious institutions can no longer be tightly integrated, as Plato supposed. Rather, as the polis deteriorates, these institutions become separate and the psychic activities proper to each of these institutions also become separated. Therefore, for Aristotle, there is "a clear differentiation into political, religious, and noetic areas of life" (*PA* 288). The philosopher's noetic soul looks to politics as an area of active interest and analysis but not one of prospective participation, not only because the noetic virtues are not the ones appropriate to political life but even because politicians are quite possibility hostile to these virtues (*PA* 303).3 [3] Given the untenable theocratic aspiration of Plato's own work and the fact that the polis as a political unit has deteriorated to the point that political institutions are clearly separate from religious and educational institutions, "to [persevere] in the attitude of the Platonic will would not have proved Aristotle the equal of his master, it would have been silly" (*PA* 294). Therefore, Voegelin writes to Strauss, Aristotle's political science cannot be centered on the myth of Socrates and the cathartic and erotic engagement with Hellenic reform. Instead Aristotle's political science is centered on "the *bios theoetikos* of the intellectual mystic" whose dispassionately looks to politics in order better to understand men than to inaugurate a new age (*FPP* 8, see *NSP* 64).

As Voegelin notes, one might suppose that Aristotle's separation of noetic life from political life would imply that Aristotle would be uninterested in political science (*PA* 310). However, Aristotle must remain interested in political science because of what Voegelin terms Aristotle's "peculiar conservatism" in hesitating "to break away from problems that had become topical through Plato," and in, particular, Aristotle's already mentioned commitment to the anthropological principle that he inherits from Plato (*PA* 313, 294). Voegelin writes, "The polis remains for Aristotle the comprehensive form of human existence" (305) and "The polis remains for him the *perfect* form of political existence in history" (310, emphasis mine). Because of Aristotle's inheritance of the anthropological principle, Aristotle must analyze the polis because he wishes to understand man and the good for man; the philosophic anthropology begun in the *Nicomachean Ethics* necessarily points towards the *Politics*. However, Voegelin notes that because of the differences in Plato's and Aristotle's political sciences, Aristotle must employ the anthropological principle in its "reversible" form. While in the *Republic* Socrates describes the polis as man writ large and presents the good polis in order to study the good man, for Aristotle it

---

3 [3] Corey (2002) critiques Voegelin's noetic political science on the grounds that Voegelin is insufficiently attentive the full range of Aristotelian noesis. However, the connection of man to the divine through nous, emphasized by Voegelin, is the aspect of nous most important to an Aristotelian political science that attempts, on the basis of the anthropological principle, how the polis and man are connected to the divine and the cosmic order.

is too evident that there will be no actualization of the good polis to begin his political science with the good polis. Therefore, Voegelin write, Aristotle must engage in a "conversion of the idea of the *Republic*" by beginning to describe the good man before describing the polis (*PA* 294).

Summarizing the development of Aristotle's political science in response to Plato's political science Voegelin writes, "There is a continuity of evolution from Plato, the founder of the good polis, through the Athenian Stranger, who transmits as much of his mystical knowledge as is bearable to the founders of a colony, to Aristotle, who formulates standards and devises means for their maximum realization under varying material conditions. *The decisive point is that this development was completed by the time Aristotle wrote the earliest parts of the* Politics" (*PA* 283, emphasis mine). Therefore, Aristotle begins his political science from a very different position than Plato's, with the result that his political science differs very markedly from Plato's in ways that are both a decline from Plato's political science and that open the possibility--unanticipated in Plato's thought--of the scientific study of actual polities.

Aristotle's Science of Politics:

Philosophical Anthropology and Nomothetic Science

An explication of Aristotle's political science is complicated, in Voegelin's view, in part because Aristotle "never achieved a clear delimitation of the field of political inquiry" (294). This failure is an artifact of the fact that Aristotle's thought is bounded by the problems he has inherited from the Platonic school even as Aristotle's own contemplative position suggests that the scope of problems inherited from Plato is inadequate to a complete science of politics. Voegelin comments that, "If anything is characteristic of Aristotle as a political thinker, it is his conservatism, that is, his hesitation to break away from the problems that had become topical through Plato and to enlarge their range. We do not find in the Aristotelian work a systematic treatment of politics from the new contemplative position; we rather find the contemplative attitude at work on a variety of problems as they present themselves in the environment" (*PA* 294). Because Aristotle, on Voegelin's account, develops his political science as a series of treatments of topics and problems, it happens that Aristotle's political science is roughly divided between the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*, with the *Ethics* containing Aristotle's philosophical anthropology and the *Politics* containing Aristotle's nomothetic science.

Aristotle's philosophical anthropology in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is "a general science of human action" that begins with the account of eudaimonia in *Ethics I*, passes to the discussion of the ethical and dianoetic virtues, and culminates in the discussion of philosophy as men's opportunity to participate in the divine (*PA* 299). This philosophical anthropology is a *political* science because, as already noted, it is grounded on the anthropological principle that Aristotle

has taken up from Plato: Voegelin writes that Aristotle is "justified in calling the science of the good of man ‘political science' because--even though the good of man is the same as the good polis, that is, eudaimonia--the good polis is greater and more perfect (in the sense of the more comprehensive *telos*)…In this comprehensive conception of political science we can sense the Platonic origin" (*PA* 295). Although Platonic in origin, Aristotle's account of man differs greatly from Plato's account especially in its account of the virtues and the separation of dianoetic virtues from ethical virtues. The *Nicomachean Ethics* also includes an account of the epistemological ground for political science in the experiences of the *spoudaios* or mature man (*PA* 299-301).

This philosophical anthropology reveals the necessity of a new nomothetic political science. Voegelin describes Aristotle's separation of dianoetic virtues from ethical virtues and the Aristotle's account of the need to habituate men into the ethical virtues through "a suitable institutional environment." It follows from this need for suitable institutions that "it will be the art of the lawgiver to create the proper institutions; and in this sense it is the principle purpose of political science to produce a certain character in the citizens…The meaning of political science is now contracted to the art of the lawgiver who mush know which institutional arrangements will produce the desired ethical excellences and which will not" (*PA* 298, see also 311-12). This need for habituation through suitable institutions, which would hold even if all the young had the potential to be *spoudaioi*, is all the more acute because many are governed by passions rather than reason (*PA* 302). To cope with this situation, the lawgiver requires prudence. The nomothetic political science is identified with prudence, one of the noetic virtues--with the curious consequence, as Voegelin notes, that political science "which supposedly produced the classification of ethical and dianoetic virtues [in the *Ethics*] now becomes one of the virtues classified" (*PA* 398). Voegelin writes, "the political science which ultimately emerges in the *Politics* is a prudential science of nomothetics, which a rich admixture of reflections on problems of ethics and philosophical anthropology" (*PA* 298). This mixture reflects the fact even Aristotle's nomothetic political science is a noetic science rather than an effort to engage in active political life by giving advice to be taken up by lawgivers (*PA* 303).

In Voegelin's view Aristotle's contraction of political science from a philosophical anthropology that could incorporate all the noetic and ethical virtues to a nomothetic science identified with prudence is, in important respects, a diminishment of political science. Voegelin writes, "Through the *Nicomachean Ethics*, rather than through the *Politics*, the prudential wisdom of Hellas has separated from the contingencies of actualization and become the possession of mankind, or rather of that part of mankind that can recognize authority and bow to it. The *Nicomachean Ethics* is the great document in which the authority of the *spoudaios* asserts itself through the ages, beyond the accidents of politics" (*PA* 303). The *Politics*, with its topical treatment of problems of political life is an important instance in the way in which Aristotle's philosophy is a "derailment" of Plato's philosophy (*PA* 277). As an example of this derailment, Voegelin criticizes Aristotle's account of cycles in political life as a "intellectual thinning-out, as compared with the Platonic fullness of experience" (*PA* 291, see also 317, 276, 319).

However, it is to the *Politics* rather than to the *Ethics* that Voegelin devotes greater attention in his *Order and History*. The *Politics* and its attention to actual polities with a view to formulating standards for analysis of political societies and to describing means for the maximum institutional realization of good political and educational practices under given conditions offers a kind of empirical political science without precedent in Plato. As Voegelin wrote to Strauss,

> Only from the Aristotelian position is the completely scientific-theoretical treatment of the political possible; but it is possible because the Platonic form, grown from myth, can now be assumed as a datum and thus without the existential participation [of the philosopher] in the myth. The Aristotelian conception of an empirical-technical science of politics, which can give proposals for improving a given situation (the central part of the *Politics* on revolutions, their origins, and their prevention), is possible on the basis of adopting, albeit manifoldly changed, a soul-image of the [Platonic] states of the ideas. I see the specific meaning of Aristotle in that as an unmythical, intellectual mystic, he is able to operate easily with the system of relevance achieved by the myth and could subsume masses of empirical material under the now conceptualized mythical image (*FPP* 9).

The *Politics* is important as a guide to Voegelin's political science because it is there we find developed the two distinct but mutually informing empirical inquiries into standards against which actual political societies may be measured and into actual political societies. The philosophical anthropology of the *Ethics* is less important as a guide to Voegelin's political science. Voegelin's own philosophical anthropology, although it takes much from Aristotle's, does not share the anthropological principle that grounds the *Nicomachean Ethics*. For Voegelin, society is not an image of man, and therefore the standards developed in the *Politics* on the basis of the philosophical anthropology in the *Ethics* cannot be the basis for a valid contemporary political science (even though there is still much to be taken from the *Ethics* and the *Politics*). Nevertheless, the method of Aristotle's nomothetic political science in the *Politics* is available for Voegelin's political science. Let us know turn to the *Politics* and its nomothetic political science.

Aristotle's Science of Politics:

The Nomothetic Science of the *Politics*

Voegelin introduces his interpretation of Aristotle's nomothetic political science in the *Politics* with an interpretation of its literary structure. Voegelin gives conspicuous attention to his interpretation of the *Politics* literary structure by treating it at length in this chapter on Aristotle's relationship to Plato that introduces his entire treatment of Aristotle in volume III of *Order and History*. The placement of Voegelin's discussion of the *Politics*' literary structure, quite separate from the extended discussion of the *Politics* offered two chapters later, seems out of place unless we appreciate how Voegelin's interpretation of the *Politics*' literary structure is motivated by his interpretation of the relationship of Aristotle's political science to Plato's political science and Voegelin's interpretation of Aristotle's method.

As any reader of the *Politics* knows, its eight books differ in focus and in tone from one another. As Voegelin writes,

> The *Politics* consists of at least three clearly distinguishable literary strata. Book II surveys and criticizes the views of predecessors on the topics of the best polis; it obviously is the introductory book of an early study on this subject. Books III, VII, and VIII contain this study of the best polis itself. Between the present Books III and VII is inserted an extensive study of the relatively best constitutions that can be realized under given conditions, as well as on the causes of revolutions and the means of avoiding them. Some, however, are inclined to consider Books IV and VI on the relatively best constitutions as belonging together, and Book V on the revolutions as a further insertion into an original *logos* comprising IV and VI. Anyway, there is agreement that IV an VI are a later study. The present Book I, finally, is probably the latest part, prefixed to the other books at the time when the whole series of *logoi* was united into its present form (*PA* 281).

Voegelin notes that the concern with actual regimes in Books IV-VI has been interpreted by some scholars as revealing the advance of the "mature, realistic" Aristotle who has set aside his "youthful idealism" under the influence of Plato. Voegelin had in mind scholars such as Ernest Barker and especially Werner Jaeger (*PA* 271 n1). We see a related concern about the order of the books of the *Politics* in Peter Simpson's recent translation of and commentary on the *Politics*. Simpson, although he does not share Jaeger's view that the differences in the *Politics* shows a development from an early to mature Aristotle (Simpson writes, "the *Politics* is a formal and doctrinal unity without even apparent incoherence"), finds it necessary to place Books IV-VI if this unity is to be maintained.4 [4]

---

4 [4] Simpson (1997) xvi-xx.

Voegelin dismisses the argument that the differences in theme and tone in the *Politics* show a development from early idealism to late realism and the attempts to date the compositions of the various books of the *Politics* with the comment, "The whole complex of conjecture seems to us inadmissible." As I have already noted, Voegelin argued that the development of Aristotle's political science and, in particular, his concern with formulating standards to be used in the assessment of actual polities "was completed by the time Aristotle wrote the earliest parts of the Politics" (*PA* 283). Therefore, differences in theme and tone need to be understood within their place in an already mature program. In his description of the literary structure and the arguments of and *Politics*, Voegelin makes clear that this program as two components: formulating standards and then bringing them to bear on actual polities.

And indeed, Voegelin's account of the literary structure of the *Politics* is that it is divided broadly into two parts, one concerned with the development of standards and the other part concerned with their application to actual polities. The development of standards obviously must be prior to the evaluation of actual political phenomena in accordance with these standards. The development of standards begins with, but is not exhausted by, Aristotle's response to Plato's account of account of the good polis (in *Politics VII* and *VIII*), and will include the critique of Plato's and other accounts of the polis (in *Politics II*) and an exposition of Aristotle's own account of the nature of the regime, the good man, and the good citizen (in *Politics III*). Voegelin emphasizes that this is an empirical inquiry. He writes:

> The Platonic vision of order has become part of reality, and while reality resists an embodiment of the Platonic idea it cannot escape the fate of being judged by it. The idea has become a standard. While a political science which intends to explore the structure of political reality cannot be exhausted by the exposition of Platonic standards, it will have to contain such an exposition as part of a more comprehensive inquiry. And, while Aristotelian politics as a whole does not execute the program, we indeed find the program realized as part of the whole work in as much as *Politics* VII and VIII (the so-called "ideal state" of the translators) is an exposition of standards in conformity with the program outlined in the opening section of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. If we accept the thesis that *Politics* VII and VIII are in continuation with II and III, we may say these four books of *Politics* correspond to the programmatic intentions just outlined. We are able, therefore, to clarify their systematic place as that part of Aristotelian politics which transforms the ordering impulses of the Platonic idea into the standards of political science. These standards, then become the instruments for classifying, evaluating, and therapeutically influencing the variety of phenomena in political reality (*PA* 295-96).5 [5]

---

5 [5] Voegelin, writing much later, confirms that there are these two aspects to Aristotle's political science in the *Politics*: "…the content of the political right is the best constitution, whose model Aristotle has outlined in *Politics* 7-8…While the outline of the model only tries to get hold of right by

By "standards"--a term that appears frequently in Voegelin's account of Aristotle's political science--Voegelin meant both a version of the best possible polis against which actual poleis may be compared and, very importantly, criteria of what is worthy of attention in analysis of actual poleis. This later is the "system of relevance achieved by [analysis of Plato's] myth" under which Aristotle "could subsume masses of empirical material" (*FPP* 9). This "system of relevance," which Voegelin finds in Aristotle's political science, is missing in the political science of his contemporaries. In his discussion of Weberian political science, Voegelin complains that Weberian science's "use of method as the criterion of science abolishes theoretical relevance" (*NSP* 8). Contemporary political scientists study what can be studied by a peculiar method borrowed from the natural sciences rather engage in a genuine study of social order.6 [6]

Voegelin's emphasis on Aristotle's transformation of "the ordering impulses of the Platonic idea into the standards of political science" is a very useful caution for our reading of these passages in the *Politics* in which Aristotle comments on Plato's texts. Voegelin comments several times on how the differences between Aristotle's and Plato's political science can make for Aristotelian responses to Plato that seem deliberately obtuse, such as Aristotle's discussion of whether 5,000 citizens is too great in response to the proposal for 5,040 citizens in the polis of Plato's *Laws*--which the Athenian Stranger proposed for is musical significance, not for its suitability to the needs of an actual polis (*PA* 293-94). It is significant that these occasions of apparently obtuse readings are located in the *Politics* rather than in the *Ethics*, because it is in the *Politics* that Aristotle develops a nomothetic political science that Plato lacks (and therefore responses to Plato's mythic political science are likely to seem inapt when made from the perspective of a nomothetic political science). In the *Ethics* Aristotle develops his philosophical anthropology that in its spirit of inquiry that is closer to Plato's inquiries (even if their conclusions are very different), and therefore there are not apparently obtuse readings of Plato in the *Ethics* as there are in the *Politics*. Voegelin's account of the relationship between Aristotle's and Plato's political science helps contextualize the occasions when Aristotle seems to make what seem to be, at first reading, obtuse readings. Another important example is Aristotle's obtuse treatment of Plato's texts, which has become important in recent decades, is Aristotle's apparently serious treatment in *Politics II* of Socrates' proposal in *Republic V* for a community of women and children proposed by Socrates in *Republic V* (see *PA* 291, 319-22). Susan Moller Okin took Aristotle's serious critique of Socrates' proposal for a community of women and children as evidence that Plato meant this proposal for actual polities.7 [7] However, if we take Aristotle's response to the

---

nature in its immutable aspect, the description of the concrete constitutions in the *Politics* displays the full range of variations of human attempts to realize the model. Only both investigations combined, as they mutually interact, make up the whole of political science" (*RN* 146-47).

6 [6] See Cooper (1999) 3-4.

7 [7] Okin (1979) 84-85.

proposal for a community of women and children in the same light as Voegelin encourages us to take Aristotle's response to the proposal for a community of 5,040, it is apparent that Aristotle's apparently obtuse readings can be explained by the differences between Plato's and Aristotle's contemplative position, not by Aristotle's misunderstanding of Plato's intentions.

While in *Politics II, III, VII,* and *VIII* Aristotle develops the standards of his political science, these standards become "the instruments for classifying, evaluating, and therapeutically influencing the variety of phenomena in political reality" in *Politics IV* through *VI*. In these books Aristotle lavishes "loving attention to empirical detail" (*PA* 342) on a study of the various forms of poleis, a particularly detailed study of the variants of oligarchy and democracy that were the prevalent forms in his day, the causes of revolutions, and the most likely ways to preserve particular regimes. In these books the use of standards in the sense of criteria of relevance is conspicuous. For example, it is necessary in order to cope great variation amongst the manifold of actual poleis, Aristotle argues that one must attend to the ways in which the rich and the poor share (or fail to share) in the rule of a polis, without troubling over details such as whether the poor are peasants or labourers. When wealth and poverty have been identified as the relevant criteria for analyzing the parts of the city, the manifold of actual poleis can be classified under relatively few variants of oligarchy and democracy. Thus this manifold is subsumed under a relatively simple typology that is amenable to analysis (*PA* 344).

Voegelin's interpretation the transition from Book III to the middle Books IV-VI is of particular interest because this transition shows how Aristotle moves from the development of standards based on empirical study of symbols in political reality to analysis of actual political societies, and how these two inquires mutually inform one another. Voegelin writes,

> The survey of forms in Books IV to VI is not set off as an empirical survey against speculations on an "ideal" form in Books III, VII, and VIII. The passages in Book IV [about the polity as a mix of oligarchy and democracy as the "best polis"]
> refer to Book III and incorporate the discussion of monarchy and aristocracy in the early book into the comprehensive survey; and one sub-variety of aristocracy is the best polis itself. Through this inclusion the perfect polis ["the aristocracy discussed in the closing chapters of Book III"] becomes one of the forms in the manifold studied in Books IV through VI, on the same systematic level as the deficient forms (*PA* 346).

Voegelin's interpretation of the transition from *Politics III* to *Politics IV* suggests a continuity of analysis and interest between the possibility of rule by outstandingly virtuous *pambasileia* at the

end of *Politics III* and polity and other actual regimes in *Politics IV*. This is at odds with the sense of the transition from *Politics III* to *Politics IV* that one finds in authors such as Harvey Mansfield, Michael Davis, and Leo Strauss. In their discussions of the end of *Politics III*, these scholars emphasize the impossibility of the *pambasileia*, the paradox of the injustice of not letting the perfectly virtuous man rule alongside the injustice of allowing his complete rule over men, and hence the impossibility of justice in politics and the necessity for a philosophic turn away from politics. On this reading, the end of *Politics III* is a moment of high drama in which the necessity of a turn from political life is made clear, and the turn to actual polities at the beginning of *Politics IV* is a descent to the mundane realm of ordinary politics.8 [8] On Voegelin's reading, there is no great break between *Politics III* and *Politics IV*, and the "loving attention" that Voegelin finds in *Politics IV-VI* suggests not a descent into the mundane but merely a redirecting of interest and focus.

Indeed, Voegelin insists that the several "logoi" found in the various sections of the *Politics* "are all on the same ‘systematic' level" (*PA* 283, see 346).9 [9] By this Voegelin means that the development of standards of analysis in *Politics II, III, VII,* and *VII* and the application of these standards to devise the relatively best constitutions for given conditions in *Politics IV-VI* are equally necessary to an empirical nomothetic political science. Commenting on the composition of the *Politics*, Voegelin writes that the fact that the middle Books IV-VI are likely of a later date there shows an "intensification of concern about immanent form." These books are "an *addition* to the Aristotelian range" that do "not *supersede* the earlier philosophical motivation. We must always be aware of the possibility that a *logos* which by the nature of its problems belongs to the earlier class--and probably in its conception goes back to the early period--has been reworked in later years without showing traces of the shift in interest" (*PA* 280). Both the development of standards and their application to actual polities necessary to Aristotle's mature political science as it was conceived, on Voegelin's account, prior to Aristotle's composition of the earliest books of the *Politics*. Because formulating standards and then bringing them to bear on actual polities are different inquiries, Voegelin finds that it is wholly unsurprising that there are "numerous conflicts between the various parts of the work" but this does not impeach the fact that the *Politics* has a coherence as a nomothetic political science because "the discourses as they are preserved are all written by Aristotle and originate in the unity of his philosophizing mind" (*PA* 283-84). Thus, in contrast to Peter Simpson, Voegelin is able to account for the unity of the *Politics* while allowing for inconsistencies that Simpson discounts and without need to reorder the books of the *Politics*.

Voegelin's Aristotelian Science of Politics

8 [8] Davis (1996) 56-73, Mansfield (1989, 1993) 34-46, Straus (1964).

9 [9] By putting "systematic" in quotation marks, Voegelin reminds us that Aristotle was not attempt a "systemic" philosophy in the sense of a comprehensive, contradiction-free account of politics (273-74, 280).

In Voegelin's empirical political science there is, just as in Aristotle's political science, two distinct but mutually informing kinds of inquiry: the development of a standard against which actual political societies may be measured by attending to how symbols found within the political community articulate its connexion to a reality above and beyond itself, and the investigation of actual political societies by those standards. Thus Voegelin's political science is Aristotelian in method, if radically different from Aristotle's in its universal, ecumenical scope and its substantial content. Two examples help to make this point: Voegelin's remarks on the Western democracies' grant of power to the communist regimes in the Soviet Union and China at the end of the *New Science of Politics*, and his discussion of legal order in his essay "The Nature of Law."

In his *New Science of Politics*, Voegelin sketches the development of political science from Plato and Aristotle to the present. He outlines several causes of the disorder in contemporary political science, including the Gnostic misunderstanding of man's relationship to the cosmic order. His account of modern Gnosticism serves as the basis for standards to be brought to bear on the actual situation of Western democracies in their confrontations with communist countries. He uses this account to analyzes the threat that communist countries pose to Western democracies and concludes that this threat is not due to causes such as the material economic strengths of communist countries but due to "Western paralysis and self-destructive politics through the Gnostic dream" (*NSP* 177). Here we see Voegelin develop standards for analysis through empirical study of symbols of the Western tradition and then provide an analysis of the situation of actual political communities.

In Voegelin's "The Nature of Law," written while Voegelin was teaching a course in jurisprudence in the Law School of Louisiana State University from 1954-7, Voegelin develops a standard by which one may judge that a political community has a valid legal order.10 [10] He develops this standard out of attention to the empirical phenomena of the American democracy and its founding documents, particularly the *Declaration of Independence*, and to the accounts of law offered by Aristotle and others. He is then able to analyze why the United States has a valid legal order but that Nazi Germany did not. In particular, his analysis showed that the fact of a written constitution may be irrelevant to the validity of a legal order, and so that those who pointed to the ongoing force of an amended written Weimar Constitution as evidence of a valid legal order in Nazi Germany were making judgments by inappropriate standards. Voegelin concludes that the United States has an imperfect but valid legal order because its laws accord with the power structure of its society, whereas the formal legal order of Nazi Germany did not

10 [10] On this essay, see Fuller (2005).

accord with its true power structure (*NL* 36-37). This analysis is Aristotelian in its mutual inquiry into standards and their application to actual polities.

Voegelin found in Aristotle a model of empirical political science that includes mutually informing investigations into the relevant standards for analyzing political societies and into actual political institutions and practices. This model of political science is, Voegelin thought, the basis for the restored political science he calls for. Because this restored political science would give such an important place to empirical study of actual regimes (at least, if this empirical study were guided by appropriate standards of relevance), we may understand why Voegelin maintains a hopeful tone in the *New Science of Politics* in spite of his harsh critique of the state of contemporary Weberian political science. Although he was a harsh critic of Weberian political science, he has a more ambiguous judgment of Weber's own work. Voegelin finds within Weber's work the seeds for a restoration of a political science that would include both the development of standards and the evaluation of actual societies against these standards. Voegelin describes how Weber's ethic of responsibility requires students to consider the consequences of political actions, with the hard-to-avoid consequence that students will develop standards of relevance. Students' empirical analyzes may prompt judgments about the desirability of various political actions, and so the emergence of the very value judgments from which Weber refrained (*NSP* 15-16). Indeed, Voegelin suggests Weber himself formulated standards of relevance and made judgments of value (*NSP* 21). Thus, Voegelin seemed to suggest that Weberian political science could be turned on itself, with suitable assistance from philosophers and historians of our intellectual tradition, to restore political science to a valid science of order.

Bibliography

Cooper, Barry. 1999. "How Voegelin can Assist Empirical Political Science," paper presented at the meeting of the Eric Voegelin Society held in conjunction with the 1999 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association.

----- and Peter Emberley. 1993, 2004. *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin*. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press.

Corey, David D. 2002. "Voegelin and Aristotle on Nous: What is Noetic Political Science?" *The Review of Politics*. 64 (no. 1):57-79.

Davis, Michael. 1996. *The Politics of Philosophy*: A Commentary on Aristotle's *Politics*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Fuller, Timothy. 2005. "Eric Voegelin on the Nature of Law." In *Philosophy, Literature, and Politics: Essays Honoring Ellis Sandoz*. Ed. Charles R. Embry and Barry Cooper. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press.

Mansfield, Harvey C., Jr. 1989, 1993. *Taming the Prince: The Ambivalence of Modern Executive Power*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Okin, Susan Moller. 1979. *Women in Western Political Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Ranieri, John J. 1999. "Grounding Public Discourse: Voegelin's Contribution." In *The Politics of Soul: Eric Voegelin on Religious Experience*. Ed. Glenn Hughes. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. 33-64.

Simpson, Peter L. Phillips, trans. 1997. *The Politics of Aristotle*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press.

Strauss, Leo. 1964. *The City and Man*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Voegelin, Eric. 1952. *The New Science of Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

-----. 1957. *Order and History, Volume III: Plato and Aristotle*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press.

-----. 1991. The Nature of Law *and Related Legal Writings (The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Volume 27).* Ed. Robert Anthony Pascal *et al*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press.

-----. 2002. "Right by Nature." In *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics* (*The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Volume 6*). Trans. M.J. Hanak, Gerhart Niemeyer. Ed. David Walsh. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press.