

Heidegger, Voegelin and the Human Predicament: A Case Study

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Modern intellectual discourse is still under the spell of the Heideggerian project. Once it had broken away from its German moorings Heideggerian thought proliferated and was received into non-German cultures. Their intellectual elites appropriated it according to their own reading of Heideggerian texts. While they came to divergent and often contradictory conclusions about the philosophical and political significance of his work, they still regard Heidegger's symbolic evocation as a most fascinating intellectual response to the multifaceted crisis of modernity. Heidegger's international reputation is not the least owed to his many legitimate and illegitimate children ranging from Gadamer, Arendt, Strauss, Lwith, Marcuse, Jonas to Sartre, Levinas and Derrida. Eric Voegelin could neither by biography nor by his own testimony counted among the intellectual offspring of Heidegger. But the common German background and the later Voegelin's exposition of a philosophy of human existence lent itself to a tendency to read Heidegger into Voegelin thus eclipsing the fact that Voegelin followed a different intellectual path  philosophically and politically - in order to come to grips with the totalitarian challenges of our time.

The paper will not raise the question how Voegelin does differ from Heidegger in terms of an overall reconstruction of the respective oeuvres nor open a new front in the Heidegger wars, but it will deal with Heidegger's involvement with national-socialist politics and raises the question whether his philosophy is congenial to national-socialist ideas. The latter question, however, is burdened with the problem that the German intellectual landscape of post-world war I was marked by an ever changing flux of ideas, doctrines, world views, sentiments and moods. Therefore, a clear cut distinction between philosophy and Weltanschauung is difficult, even if we can distinguish between the academic language of university philosophers and the language of the proponents of the many Weltanschauungen, but in view of concepts and ideas this distinction is blurred. This explains why philosophers and other intellectuals in good standing

could become intellectual national-socialists without subscribing to the Weltanschauung of the Nazi-party ♦ at least for a time.

But the purpose of my remarks is less ambitious as that I want to explore the political animus as it comes to the fore in the theoretical reflections of these two thinkers in order to show how their theoretical positions were explicitly or implicitly connected with issues of eminent public relevance..

It is beyond the scope of this interjection to offer a comparative portrait of Heidegger and Voegelin and sketch their respective background, their intellectual biography and the lifeworlds they came from. But a few hints should be given. There was Martin Heidegger¹ [1], the upcoming star among German philosophy professor who attracted the academic youth who became enthusiastic about his radical questioning intellectual traditions and his quest for a new beginning of philosophical thinking by turning to the "facticity of life" itself and uncover its authentic meaning in a time of nonauthenticity. Voegelin² [2], twenty years younger, was an unknown Privatdozent in an insecure and ill-paid Position and lousy academic prospects who had set out to reconstruct the German Staatslehre in terms of a comparative hermeneutics of the socio-cultural reality and its mental forms. Here is Heidegger the churched Catholic who broke with the scholastic philosophy of his church in order to be admitted into a philosophical establishment being convinced that a catholic was unfit to philosophize. There, Voegelin, the unchurched Protestant who, so to speak, placed himself between the disciplines of law and sociology hampered in his career for the lack of a law degree. But there was one crucial mark of difference. Heidegger has never left Germany, he was and remained by his own decision in the German province, he came from rural south-west Germany, his life-horizon was small town academia, there was no urbanity, no international experience ♦ Heidegger turned his provincialism into a matter of philosophical principle: true thinking is only possible in the German or Greek language, when the French think they do it in German.³ [3] That's why only

German can express the philosophical epiphany of the meaning of Being within the specific ontic condition of the entity that is human Dasein. The Anglo-Saxon world was not only irrelevant in this respect, its pragmatic-technical approach to things prevents any philosophical thinking. In his opinion Bolshevism was just a variety of Americanism ,so in 1942. Heidegger derived his identity from his being German , thus his thinking revolved around the German people, the Volk, with all the implication the term had in German intellectual and political thought. Voegelin, who switched citizenship in his twenties, , was not earthbound , he grew up in the urbane city culture of Vienna , his father was an engineer, he had not the usual education of a Bildungsbürger. But more important: After he got his PhD he went to Berlin , Heidelberg and Oxford , on a Rockefeller grant to the United States and then to Paris . This international academic socialisation was unique. He came to know the different cultural worlds, took part in the international intellectual discourse and build up an intellectual and scientific network that reached far beyond the Viennese discourse-community. The experience of a plurality of societal forms, scientific styles and milieus was crucial to Voegelin's scholarly outlook and his scientific work because it had to move beyond the German-Austrian and the central European point of reference and open up to the Western world of ideas and its forms of thought. That introduced him to the multiformity of historical concretions of the spirit as it appears in the personality of human being.. This critical distance to his own academic upbringing explains in part why Voegelin lost interest in Heidegger and never cared for a pilgrimage to Freiburg.

One last biographical remark to the politics of both thinkers. Whatever Heidegger saw in Hitler's rise to power he was convinced of the revolutionary force of the movement to return the German people to their true being and, thus, to their original and authentic destiny, Heidegger joined enthusiastically the movement becoming a party member, signing the infamous commitment of the professorate to Hitler. The German mandarins believed from Hegel's inauguration lecture in Berlin onward that the university was the central agency of national spiritual and cultural life and was destined to lead and effectuate the regeneration of the nation. .Heidegger seemed to have believed that his revolutionary and radical philosophical reconstruction of existential truth of Being incorporated the true meaning of National-socialism to be realized by the reformed university under the guidance of the philosophical leader . The university politician Heidegger

remained an episode because the National-socialists and their proponents of a völkische Weltanschauung failed in Heidegger's eyes but he remained committed to the greatness and truth of the National-socialist movement until 1945 as recently published material documents.

Voegelin watched the events in Germany from the outside ♦ he seemed to have suspended his judgement for a while before he became aware of what was happening. He even pondered

the possibility to search for a position in Germany because he assumed that his study of the race question should be of interest to the German university establishment. This was, of course, a misreading of the situation, after all his still Weberian approach to the matter denounced the scientific claim of the Nazi race doctrine declaring it a political myth with dangerous consequence when put into political practice. What the National-socialists thought of him became obvious in a review of the race book written by Norbert Görke, son of law of the leading Nazi jurist Koellreutter: Voegelin had himself placed outside of National-socialist science.⁴ [4] Early in 1934 the German development lead him to sum up the features of the new order that "tended more to the destruction of a complete life-form than to the creation of a new one, and, in the event of a de facto failure, the danger of a horrible psychic breakdown".⁵ [5] .

In consequence a political and theoretical re-orientation set in: Politically the former social-democrat supported the emerging authoritarian regime of the Christian Social Party, because he was persuaded that the instability of Austrian democracy would invite a German take-over as attempted in the abortive Nazi-coup in 1934 - in his judgement the Christian Social party alone was willing to defend Austrian independence and to maintain a modicum of rule of law. The theoretical shift entailed basically a move toward a reassessment of the theoretical value of the Christian-humanist understanding of human personality as the hallmark of Western thought and, more important, his understanding of the nature of social science changed very much.

II

The following case study takes into account this differing in r political options of Heidegger and Voegelin in the mid- thirties and but focuses on the fundamental disagreement as to the meaning of human existence in society and history. In brief, the inquiry points out the contrast between Heidegger's destruction of the classical Christian humanist notion of human nature and Voegelin's turn to philosophical anthropology emphasising the ontologically grounded idea of human personality. The analysis starts from Heidegger's pointed critique of Haecker's book *What is Man?* in 1935 comparing it to Voegelin's writings in the same and it will be broadened and suggest a few general observations on both thinker's position concerning the human condition at a critical juncture of German history.

In 1935 the outlawing of Jews and people of Jewish decent was in full swing , ideologically and politically suspicious individuals disappeared in concentration camps, the murder of thousands in the aftermath of the so-called Röhm putsch had taken place etc. etc. In this situation the catholic Theodor Haecker reminded his church collaborating with Hitler and the intellectual community and here foremost the philosophers of the "idea of a genuine humanity":. It is contemplation and not action that leads us to the insight that human beings are created in the image of God. Without this truth of the idea of humanity we arrive at the consequence that "God could not become and has not become 'man' per se, but only Jew ; that God is 'species-bound' (artgebunden), that he had to become first German or Prussian or Slave in order to have validity for them". These would be the conclusions to be drawn from 'species-bound' philosophy. Such a crippled philosophy and blasphemous theology will throw us in an abyss of barbarity⁶ [6] . This was an intellectual declaration of war and Heidegger was aware of it. In the summer semester 1935 Heidegger gave a course on *An Introduction to Metaphysics* that offered a critical review of Christian philosophy and more specifically of Haecker's book. William T. Tate has mentioned this episode already in a paper *Reading Voegelin as a Response to Heidegger* read at the San Francisco meeting in 1996.. In his lecture Heidegger argued in favour of eliminating Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular in the public realm. The whole story of this incident is told by Hugo Ott ⁷ [7] . Heidegger said the following: "In a book that came to me

only a few days ago I read: ♦ The real appearance of truth on the form of the God-man set the seal on the Greek's philosophical insight concerning the rule of logos over all existence. This confirmation and seal establish the classicism of Greek philosophy. " And he continues: "If a man believes the propositions of Catholic dogma, that is his individual concern; we shall not discuss here. But how can we be expected to take a man seriously who writes ♦ What is man?' on the cover although he does not ask questions because he is unable to ask questions. And when the Frankfurter Zeitung among others praise such a book , which questions merely on its cover, as ♦ an extraordinary , magnificent and courageous work' even the blindest among us know where we stand." Why does he, Heidegger, mention such absurd things? Because it confuses the standards and attitudes in that most people do not know anymore, "where and by whom the real decisions must be made if the toughness and primordially of historical knowledge should be joined together with the greatness of historical willing." It is the acting will, not contemplation that sets the standards of life. What are the decisions that are at stake? It is the destiny of the "metaphysical people" to decide the fate of Europe and the world by means of the re-enactment of the greatness of the Greek beginnings. The self-assertion against Russia and America requires this decision. If Germany takes over the responsibility for Europe it takes over the leadership at the same time.⁸ [8] This was the political agenda of the National-socialists.

Heidegger's political animus drove him to an activism that he practised in the lecture hall after he failed as the spiritual reformator of National-socialist Germany.

Heidegger's denunciation of contemplative reflection on the nature of humanity is intrinsically connected with his interpretation of Aristotle that is at the root of his "radical phenomenological anthropology" and turned the Greek-Christian understanding up side down because it subordinates theoretical life to the practical life of *phronesis* as Michael Gillespie in his paper on *Heidegger's Aristotelian Facsimile* has shown. Heidegger understands that for Aristotle *sophia* ranks higher than *phronesis* and that "consequently authentic human existence is possible only for the theoretical wise man, not for *phronimos* or man of affairs." But Heidegger extracts from the text his own foregoing conclusion that "the fundamental experience of Dasein for Aristotle is not theoretical but lies in the interaction of life with the world. Only *phronesis* (in Heidegger's

philosophical newpeak: caringly looking around ♦ circumspection J.G.) is communicable within the realm of Dasein's fundamental Being-with-others, and finally, putting *phronesis* before *sophia* results from an misunderstanding of the true meaning of Being on part of the Greeks.⁹ [9] Without further inquiry into Heidegger's Aristotelianism the decisive point of his anthropology can be stated: The historical epiphany of Being is taking place in human interaction that is the collectivity of the people as represented by the agency of the leader.

This is not to say that Heidegger's multifaceted thinking does not offer a plethora of important insights arising from his '♦existential analysis', but the crux of the matter is, that Germany's most outstanding philosopher in the 20th century became a National-socialist whatever this may mean.

Eric Voegelin's attempts at a re-orientation of the understanding of the human being and the state in a geisteswissenschaftliche Staatslehre were increasingly carried on in terms of a theory inspired by the Aristotelian vision of the *bios theoretikos* and the attendant anthropology of the human self opening itself toward the whole order of being. Its categorical centre is: the modality of a general and historical openness of the reflecting human being. The theoretical practise of a reflecting science is by necessity different from the practise of the acting politician in that it involves the contemplative withdrawal from the power struggle. It is *theoria* in the Aristotelian sense, he wrote in 1936, that cultivates the *theiōtaton*, the spiritual core of human being, the indispensable element in the formation of political community. What is the accomplishment of this contemplative attitude in the present situation. "Theory can achieve an important communal purpose that is grounded in human nature". The emotional focus on communal life and its imperatives "threatens to elevate the object of this emotions, the people or the class, immensely, divinizing it; a demonic being, the community, replaces God, and a demonic faith and a demonic ethic replaces religion ♦ this is the very political Weltanschauung whose type we outlined earlier. By means of its fundamental openness toward the world theory can help to prevent a demonizing closure of a communal ♦world'; theory directs our gaze to the multiplicity of

communities that exist alongside one another and can thereby prevent us from raising the value of one's own community to an absolute height"10 [10]

In sum: at the outset of their theoretical reflection Heidegger and Voegelin intend to separate philosophy respectively theory from the prevalent *Weltanschauung*. The encounter with National-socialism leads the first to blend philosophy and politics and thereby succumbing to *Weltanschauung*, the second, keeps theory at distance from politics making *Weltanschauung* the object of his critical inquiry in order to lay open its political consequences.

. From the vantage point of his cotemplative *theoria* Voegelin could give a critical assessment of the German situation, it went beyond the iron cage of *volkische* identity that held Heidegger captive. Voegelin developed an anthropologically grounded typology of political forms that relates the societal order to the idea of the person as its essential constituent, and applied in a comparative analysis of the essential difference between the Western nation state and what he called the imperial people as that he defines Germany by reason of Germany's belated nation-building and the preservation of the imperial idea in the nation.

In the Western nation states the philosophy of the person and the philosophy of the political human being converge, while in Germany the two diverge. In this respect the nation states live still under the spell of the Christian tradition. Political consciousness forms the political man according to the primacy of personality and not according to the primacy of membership in a secular collective as it is the case with an imperial people. The value of the individual person loses to the idea of human beings being part of a non-personal collective such as the people. Here ideas revolving around the real factors of power, economics and blood impacted upon political consciousness in a higher degree than elsewhere. An outgrowth of this is the ascendancy of the race idea in the context of the imperial people. This idea of a community based upon the physical nature of man and the *Weltanschauung* derived from this idea builds on an reassessment of the vital sphere and the concomitant change in the existential mood. "New insights into the relevance of the a-rational in human existence develop across the board. The disruption of the Christian cosmos is psychologically accompanied by a sharpened sensitivity to the sources of the

atypical, the abnormal, the a-rational, the disorderly. In the sphere of ethics, we can clearly detect the incipient dissolution of firm norms and traditions. From the German idealism onward a series of transitions involving the dissolution of the rational and the new determination of a-rational life as the source of law hereupon from Fichte, Nietzsche, Bergson to Simmel and Weber materializes in speculations about moral phenomena being conceptualized in terms like existence, attitude, concrete situation, responsibility, immediacy, decision♦" The collective idea of the people is a secular collective idea that feeds on the vital sphere and it is the crucial moment of the German idea of the people. This new idea of community emerges from a historico-political reality that is grounded in an anxiety arising from the loss of a firm idea of a spiritually meaningful togetherness that human beings unified and binds to each other. The claim of the German idea of the people to be chosen needs always a counter-world of the non-elected, the damned, in order to fly the shock of loneliness and to safeguard the final state of universal happiness: The field of redemption is limited to the nation in National-socialism and its deliverers are an imagined particular community acting as elite within the nation."11 [11]

A summary of this brief and, therefore, pointed comments leads to the recognition of how strongly the position of Heidegger and Voegelin diverge intellectually and politically. We are confronted with contrasting agendas that, however, are quasi complementary to each other as far as the major issues at stake are concerned in the critical 30ies ♦ what was at stake was indeed the question of Haecker What is man?.