

**Voegelin and the Scandal of Luther:
Philosophy, Faith, and the Modern Age**

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However luminous the thought of Eric Voegelin may be as a whole, any sensitive reader of his writings on Luther and on the Reformation purportedly inaugurated by his "Great Confusion"¹-a claim to be considered in due course about the relationship of ideas to historical reality-is bound to be perplexed, if not scandalized. The imbalance of soul of which Voegelin accuses Luther is reflected in the very work that seeks to take his (Luther's) measure: the "blundering"² Luther, who seems incapable of intellectual subtlety, is characterized without subtlety; Voegelin's accusation that Luther "was fundamentally concerned with nothing but the promulgation of his peculiar, personal experience and its imposition as an order of existence on mankind at large"³, seems, on the

¹Eric Voegelin, *Collected Works, Vol. XXH; History of Political Ideas, Vol. IV: Renaissance and Reformation*, D. L. Morse and W. M. Thompson ed. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), Ch. 1, "The Great Confusion," pp. 217-9 1. References to this work hereafter will be to author and page number only.

² Voegelin, p. 230.

³ Voegelin, p. 259.

basis of this work at any rate, to betray a thinker who, in some measure, was intent on more than a bit of promulgating and imposing of his own. Where throughout the corpus of Voegelin's writings we find sympathetic acts of reconstruction, as deep as they are urgent, his account of Luther is an act of condescension, made necessary not because Luther's ruminations alert us to a novel exposition of the relationship between man and God that comports with changing historical verities, but rather because of the damage that that formulation purportedly caused subsequent to its exposition.

It would be erroneous, of course, to suggest that Voegelin's assessment of Luther could be understood simply as a Roman Catholic polemic against the Reformation. That said, at times he sounds remarkably like, say, MacIntyre, for whom the crisis of modernity is a euphemism by which the individuated consciousness wrought by the Reformation may be attacked more politely ⁴ in the now wearisome debate between liberals and communitarians about the ontological status of the individual.⁵, Voegelin's

⁴ For a slightly different view see Stephen Holmes,

⁵ See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 53, where, on the Protestant view there is "no genuine comprehension of man's true end; and

ibid., pp. 250-51, where Hobbes and Locke, among others, are purveyors of the "individualist view" in which society is "nothing but a collection of strangers, each pursuing his or her own interest under minimal constraints." See also p. 165, *passim*, where the beginning of the end is located with Luther.

⁶ See Voegelin, p. 221. See also ibid., p. 251: "The development of the experiences of Johannine Christianity (which, it is my impression, was closest to St. Thomas) in the doctrine of *fides caritate formata*, and the amplification of this doctrinal nucleus into a grandiose, systematic philosophy of man and society, is the medieval climax of the interpenetration of Christianity with the body of an historical civilization. Here perhaps we touch the historical *raison d'être* of the West, and certainly we touch the empirical standard by which the further course of Western intellectual history must be measured."

early reverential reference to St. Thomas⁶ certainly lends credence to the view that his sympathies are Roman Catholic. Moreover, Voegelin seems intent to lay the blame for Hitler and National Socialism in Germany on Luther's doorstep⁷ and this also corresponds to the rhetorical move made by MacIntyre, for whom we must decide, in the end, between the philosophy of Aristotle or that of Nietzsche---or to put the matter in undisguised *theological* terms, between St. Thomas and Luther. For both Voegelin and MacIntyre, the Reformation is implicated in the collapse of Western Civilization, the evidence of which is "the German problem"--understood either politically (Voegelin) or philosophically (MacIntyre).⁸

Voegelin, however, cannot be read as an unequivocal defender of St. Thomas; and this poses problems for the view that he was simply defending the Roman Catholic philosophical tradition. With respect to his understanding of sin, as we shall see, he sides

⁶ See Voegelin, p. 221. See also ibid., p. 251: "The development of the experiences of Johannine Christianity (which, it is my impression, was closest to St. Thomas) in the doctrine of *fides caritate formata*, and the amplification of this doctrinal nucleus into a grandiose, systematic philosophy of man and society, is the medieval climax of the interpenetration of Christianity with the body of an historical civilization. Here perhaps we touch the historical *raison d'être* of the West, and certainly we touch the empirical standard by which the further course of Western intellectual history must be measured."

⁷ Voegelin, p. 246; p. 268.

⁸ Strauss, too, works in this idiom, though for him Machiavelli, not Luther, inaugurates the Modern turn. That said, like MacIntyre, Strauss leads us to believe that modernity ends with Germany as well- in Nietzsche and Heidegger. The odd ongoing intellectual alliance between Straussians and Roman Catholics today derives in large part from their concurrence about the end point of modernity, but not about its origin. All things modern, including (strangely enough) the Anglo-American tradition, collapse into things German. A superb example of the Straussian-Roman Catholic alliance is provided by the work of Pierre Manent, notably, his *City of Man* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998)---a book that begins with a dedication to Allan

Bloom and ends with the claim that "we never understand more than half of things when we neglect the science of Rome" (Ch. VI, p. 206).

with Roman Catholicism; yet because of his subtle account of the relationship between those "flash[es] of eternity" ⁹I that irrupt into historical existence, and the always idiomatic articulations that purport to illuminate (but not capture) that flash, he could not accede to the keys"¹⁰ of the Christian faith. Consider the following example:

The evocation of the Roman summepiscopate was intimately connected with the unchallenged evocation of the Western empire. With the disintegration of the imperial evocation through the internal and external changes of the historical scene, the *Romanitas* of the spiritual power could not remain an unchallenged symbol as if nothing had happened. With the finality of the imperial idea, the finality, not of Christianity, but of its Roman ecclesiastical form would pale. With the historical relativation of the imperial idea, the *Romanitas* of Christianity would become a historical accident. And the leadership of the church would be faced with the task of spiritualizing the idea of the universal church in such a manner that it would be independent of the Roman accident.¹¹

Beyond the looming problem of the relationship between Empire and the symbols that emerge within it to illuminate man's relationship to the Divine (a problem that occupied St. Thomas not at all), there is the perhaps related problem that symbols themselves are subject to degradation and misuse. Voegelin's claim that he was a "Pre-Nicene Christian"¹² is indicative of this dismay about the doctrinal ossification to which

⁹ Voegelin, p. 223.

¹⁰ See Matt. 16:17-18.

¹¹ Voegelin, p. 224.

¹² See Gerhart Niemeyer, "Christian Faith, and Religion, in Eric Voegelin's Work," in *Within and Above Ourselves: Essays in Political Analysis* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1996), p. 138.

Christianity has been prone, about the respect in which intellectual trespassing--which is not to be confused with philosophy proper--empties symbols of their meaning in the very act of "clarifying" them.

It is theoretically impermissible to submit a ritual mystery, like the conversion, to an "interpretation" in terms of Aristotelian metaphysics, as was done in the doctrine of transubstantiation. Once this fallacious path is taken, it is only a question of time and circumstance before indignant metaphysicians will rebel against a substance without accidents and accidents without substance.... [The] ancestry [of this path] goes back beyond the Reformation into the metaphysical trespassing of the scholastic period. The enlightened misunderstanding of symbols, the Gnostic inclination to extend the operation of the intellect into the realm of faith and myth, begins for special problems as early as the twelfth century; and among the sinners we find, perhaps unexpectedly, even Saint Thomas .¹³

If Voegelin is a Thomist, the manner in which this is so remains to be demonstrated, his apparent sympathies notwithstanding.

A more fruitful way of approaching the question of Voegelin's generally sensitive rendering of St. Thomas and overt condescension toward Luther is to attend, not to their respective theological ruminations, but rather to Luther's judgment about the philosophical enterprise as a whole and its place in the economy of salvation. In this Voegelin is correct: Luther is anti-philosophical,¹³ while St. Thomas is not. For Voegelin, this rejection sets the stage for the brutality of thought that would follow in the works of Comte and Marx, among others. Here we have a form of guilt by association, in which all anti-philosophical thought is assumed to be alike. A morphological similarity is taken

¹³ Voegelin, pp. 226-28.

¹⁴ Voegelin, pp. 237-38, *passim*.

to indicate genetic kinship. Were Voegelin to have been a biologist he might have said that because both birds and insects have wings they must be closely related. Luther's rejection of philosophy, unlike Comte and Marx's rejection, was not intended to close off the soul to the Transcendent dimension, but rather to make it "available" again. Voegelin seems not to have understood this at all. So let us reopen the question, and consider in a more sensitive light why Luther rejected philosophy, and chose instead "faith."

◆ 1. Luther and the Problem of Faith

Any curious reader of Luther will notice that his arguments against the Roman Catholic Church amount to a reconceptualization of the locus of faith. In historical Judaism, as Hobbes reminds us, the carrier of faith was the body Israel, in which there was no separation of spiritual and temporal power.¹⁵ In the Roman Catholic tradition, there is a subtle relationship between these two domains, wherein the carrier of faith is not the body of a nation, but rather the Church itself. The nation is separated off, theoretically, at least. (In the Eastern Orthodox Church this separation is less evident.) In Lutheran thought the carrier of faith--in *principle*, though not yet in actuality--is not the church, but rather persons, individuals.

¹⁵ See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Edwin Curley ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1994), Part III, Ch. 39, 15, p. 316: "Temporal and spiritual government, are but two words brought into the world, to make men see double, and mistake their lawful sovereign." Hobbes's project in *Leviathan* can be understood as an attempt to show how Judaism prior to Saul understood temporal government rightly, while from the period of Saul forward into the present Christian age men have separated what should be unified.

Now I recognize that any one of these three statements--about Judaism, Roman Catholicism, and Lutheranism--would need to be modified in order to do justice to the traditions to which they pertain. Nevertheless, the general historical pattern suggests that in the West the locus of faith becomes successively differentiated, "smaller," in a way: from the nation, to the church, to the

individual. I should add before proceeding any further that each of these formulations is still being wrestled with today—in Israel under the form of the question, "who is a member of this nation"¹⁶; in the Roman Catholic Church under the form of the question, "what is the relationship of the Church to the nations"¹⁷; in Protestantism under the form of the question, "what does it mean to be an individual"¹⁸--and no one of the formulations at which these traditions arrive seem entirely adequate as a way of locating faith within the pluralistic horizon stipulated by cosmopolitan society today. It is, however, Luther's formulations of this new *personal* locus of faith with which we are concerned here, and with a view to explaining why this new locus entailed a rejection of philosophy.

¹⁶ See Yossi Shain

¹⁷ See St. Augustine, *City of God*, Henry Bettenson trans. (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), Bk. XIX, Ch. 17, pp. 877-79.

¹⁸ See Ernst Troeltsch, *Vie Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, Olive Wyon trans. (New York: Harper & Row, 1931), Conclusion, pp. 1005-06: "The Christian Ethos alone possessed, in virtue of its personalistic Theism, a conviction of personality and individuality, based on metaphysics, which no Naturalism or Pessimism can disturb. That personality which, rising above the natural order of life, is only achieved through a union of the will and the depths of being with God, alone transcends the finite, and alone can defy it. Without this support, however, every kind of individualism evaporates into thin air." Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, Howard V. and Edna H. Hong ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), Part 1, A; p. 13: A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between the two. Considered in this way, a *human being is still not a self* (emphasis added).

Since we are investigating the meaning of faith, let us start with Luther's rejection of "works." For it is in contradistinction to works that faith achieves its coherence—or rather, it is in contradistinction to faith that the problem of works comes into view. (Above all, let us move beyond Voegelin's assertion that in rejecting works, Luther did not understand that he had stumbled into a "racket of international high finance."¹⁹)

It would be correct, though inadequate, to say that Luther's hostility toward works derived from his suspicion of the Church's claim that it held the keys to salvation. Where works are said to be necessary for salvation, there the Church derives great power over the faithful. Luther thought this to be an abuse. Yet over and above this point, his rejection of works must be understood to follow from his much deeper rejection of the Church's theoretical reliance on the analogical vision of the relationship between the orders of reality, in favor of one based on what can be called a dialectical vision of history—one in which the Old Testament prefigures and is fulfilled by the New.

Not analogy, but rather history, is the key to understanding the relationship between the orders of reality: this is Luther's great break with the Roman Catholic Church.²⁰ His thinking about works must be understood in this context.

¹⁹ Voegelin, p. 230.

²⁰ See Martin Luther, "Lectures on Isaiah," in *Luther's Works*, Helmut T. Lehmann ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), Vol. 16, p. 237: faith must be based on the basis of history, and we ought to stay with it alone and not so easily slip into allegories."

In contradistinction to ideas of resemblance and completion that are the tropes of analogical reasoning, Luther believed that there were only two realms, carnal and spiritual; that the carnal realm, "the world," was steeped in sin (about which more shortly); and that the relationship between the two realms can only be understood in terms of Christ's atonement. Christ's fulfillment, His advent in history, superceded what was prefigured in the Old Dispensation; and history acquires its epochal character by virtue of the centrality of this Divine event. The Divine irruption into history renders works obsolete, for it reconfigures the location where the wound of man may be healed by the love of God. Ante *adventurn Christi* there had been other provisional possibilities. Now neither the unity of the nation nor the apostolic authority of the church regarding what must be believed and what must be done are enough; the location of atonement--the "place of propitiation"²¹--has shifted to the interior of each and every believer.

We must go further, however; for it is not the historical fact of the Incarnation that gives credence to Luther's formulation. The radicality of Luther's claim stems from its

²¹ In the Old Testament the place of reconciliation of man before God is understood spatially; for Roman Catholics it is understood institutionally; for Protestants it is understood *internally-which* is not to say solipsistically. See Karl Barth, *Theologian of Freedom*, Clifford Green ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), Part 2, p. 138: "In the Old Testament cultus the *covering of propitiation* was the sheet of gold, overshadowed by the wings of the two-angel-figures (cherubim), which covered and marked the place where the contents of the ark, the oracles of God, were deposited (Exod. 25:17-21). In I Sam. 4:4, 2 Sam. 6:2, Ps. 80: 1, it is the *place* above which God himself dwells; in Exod. 25:22, Num. 7:89, it is the *place* from which God speaks to Moses; it is pre-eminently, however, the *place*, where, on the great Day of Atonement, the people were reconciled to God by the sprinkling of blood (Lev. 16:14-15). The analogy with Jesus is especially appropriate, because the mercy seat is no more that a particular, though very significant, *place*. By the express counsel of God, Jesus has been appointed from eternity as the *place* of reconciliation above which God dwells and from which he speaks; now, however, he occupies a position in time, in history, and in the presence of humanity" (emphasis in original).

understanding that a new, spiritual, dimension of existence is revealed by the advent of Christ's irruption into history. While under the Old Dispensation works were necessary; under the New they are not sufficient, and this, because what is required now is passive righteousness--through which, and only through which, the interiority of faith may be revealed. To give the matter in a

succinct formulation: the active righteousness of works (about which more shortly) is to the Old Dispensation as the passive righteousness of faith is to the New Dispensation.

Since faith can rule only the inner man [it is] clear that the inner man cannot be justified, freed, or saved by any outer work or action at all, and that these works, whatever their character, have nothing to do with the inner man.²²

One may complain, as Voegelin does,²³ about all the problems that that creates, but it is not at all clear that the interior, personal, locus of faith about which Luther writes was the cause of the wreckage that followed, or a formulation of human experience that was able to render the social transformations that were already well underway endurable and perhaps even meaningful.

We are still concerned with the Luther's rejection of philosophy---a move Voegelin comprehends in light of the subsequent developments of the thought of Comte and Marx,

²² Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 3 1, p. 347. Hegel understood, as Voegelin did not, that Luther's rejection of works could only be understood in the context of this new historical situation, one in which freedom reveals itself to--or rather as--the interior life of man. See G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover, 1956), Part IV, Sec. III, Ch. I, p. 415: "Luther's simple doctrine is that the specific embodiment of the Deity--infinite subjectivity, that is true spirituality, Christ is in no way present in an outward form, but as essentially spiritual is obtained only in being reconciled to God--in faith and spiritual enjoyment, (emphasis in original).

²³ Voegelin, pp. 262-63, passim.

but which Luther defends²⁴ in light of the rupture wrought by the Incarnation. In view of Voegelin's scant attention to the Incarnation of Christ,²⁵ it is not surprising that he should disregard this critical aspect of Luther's thought. For Luther, the Incarnational irruption was, following St. Paul, the counterpoint to Adam's defection.

Therefore as by the offense of one judgment can upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous .²⁶

The Gospel--the Good News--shows itself to man only in and through this relationship, where man takes upon himself the part of Adam as *sinner*, that Christ may take man up before God as worthy of Life. In sin, in the experience of condemnation and fault, the spiritual dimension, man's true home, appears. Of this home "the world" knows nothing. Luther's polemic against the Roman Catholic Church is often couched in terms of its foreclosure of this dimension; yet it would be misguided to presume that the problem was simply an institutional one. It was deeper than that, rooted in the fact of man's defection from God.)While grace ultimately accomplishes the turn toward the spiritual dimension, man's temptation is to remain imprisoned within the

carnal realm, where he presumes to save himself through works of his own devising, through what Luther called active righteousness.

²⁴ See, for example, Martin Luther, "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate," in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 44, p. 201: "this dead heathen (Aristotle) has conquered, obstructed, and almost succeeded in suppressing the books of the living God. I can only believe that the devil has introduced this study."

²⁵ See Bruce Douglass, "A Diminished Gospel: A Critique of Voegelin's Interpretation of Christianity," in *Eric Voegelin's Search for Order in History*, Stephen A. McKnight ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), p. 146: "[w]hat is missing [in Voegelin's thought] is the sense of the Gospel *in the specifically Christian sense*" (emphasis in original).

²⁶ Rom. 5:18-19. See also I Cor. 15: 21-22.

Active righteousness is the great temptation of man, inscribed into his nature because of sin. He is marked as a sinner because he misses the mark (harmatia). He is marked by active righteousness because he wishes to escape the wounding arrow of condemnation that sin occasions. Pride is this escape from condemnation; it is the clothing by which man covers his condemnation,²⁷ and protects himself from the wounding arrow of God. Wearing such clothing, man comfortably turns his attention to his "works," so that he may build a world that prolongs his illusion that he is not naked before God. Man is too proud to endure the terror of condemnation, and so prefers to imagine that righteousness can be attained through works that he can both comprehend and affect with his own resources. God stands in need of nothing; man, made in the image of God,²⁸ imputes this attribute to himself. man wishes not to need God. God creates a world out of love; man creates a world that stands in need of no love, since he denies the need of all gifts that he cannot repay through more works. Man therefore walks in darkness,²⁹ and is oblivious to the gifts that can save him.

²⁷ Gen. 3:7 ("And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons").

²⁸ Gen. 1:26.

²⁹ Cf. John 1:5 ("And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not").

But such is human weakness and misery that in the terrors of conscience and the danger of death we look at nothing except our own works, our worthiness, and the law. When the law shows us our sin, our past life immediately comes to our mind. Then the sinner, in his great anguish of mind, groans and says to himself. 'Oh, how damnably I have lived! If only I could live longer! Then I would amend my life.' Thus human reason cannot refrain from looking at active righteousness, that is, its own righteousness; nor can it shift its gaze to passive, that is, Christian righteousness.³⁰

Works, however, do not appease, but rather generate a melancholy and troubled conscience, from which fallible reason finds no genuine escape.³¹ Man works to free himself from the debt

he owes God by virtue of his sin. He builds, instead, a prison of melancholy. The harder man tries to overcome it through good works the more it obtrudes. Tempted by the devil, man attempts man to rely on his own resources; yet the inner secret of man's bold satisfaction with himself is a melancholy conscience. Melancholy is a result of the spiritual disease of man, and cannot be comprehended, as Voegelin suggests, in terms of a psychological disposition of Luther's that was itself the first cause of his theological formulations.³²

³⁰ Luther, "Lectures of Galatians," in *Works*, Vol. 26, p. 5 (emphasis added). See Thomas M. McDonough, *The Law and the Gospel in Luther* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 30: "for Luther, the human will is somehow curved in on itself... and bent ineluctably on earthly goods. This is the concupiscence or carnality that Luther identifies with sin." Cf. Martin Heidegger's essay, "The Essence of Truth," (in *Martin Heidegger.- Basic Writings* [New York: Harper & Row, 1977], p. 134). Heidegger there suggests that 'filling up the world' intimates a hiding from Being. Luther has the same insight, viz., that the terror of conscience, the terror of looking below the everyday world of works, leads Christians to "look at nothing except ... works." See also Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, Allan Bloom trans. (New York: Basic Books, 1979), Bk. IV, pp. 229-30.

³¹ See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, J.P. Mayer ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), Vol. II, Part II, Ch. 13, p. 536: "Americans cleave to the things of this world as if assured that they will never die, and yet are in such a rush to snatch any that come within their reach, as if expecting to stop living before relishing them. They clutch everything but hold nothing fast, and so lose grip as they hurry after some new delight."

³² See Voegelin, p. 249: "[Luther's mood] may be described as a profound anxiety and uncertainty of salvation; the anxiety could be overlaid by the exuberant confidence of justification through faith, but it never ceased to cast a shadow of melancholy over Luther's life."

Good works, no matter how many of them he performs, cannot appease man's conscience.³³ He must find respite in the *interior* dimension of faith³⁴ a dimension that appears only when man falls into the abyss of wretchedness, into "Hell," as Christ did when He died to "the world"--by which Luther meant the everydayness with which man is preoccupied when actively righteous.

It is evident that *no external thing* has any influence in producing Christian righteousness or freedom, or in producing unrighteousness or servitude.... None of these things touch either the freedom or servitude of the soul.³⁵

Faith is only underneath the everydayness of factual history and in authenticity-if I may invoke somewhat Heideggerian language. The horizon of factual history within which most of philosophy operates knows nothing of this dimension.³⁶

Importantly for our analysis here, this *experience of powerlessness* is the precondition for the "appearance" of Christ--an appearance made possible only when

³³ Luther, "Lectures on Galatians," in *Works*, Vol. 26, p. 5.

³⁴ In Hegel's estimation this insight was a portentous one that signaled a grasping of the truth of Christianity, which the Roman Church had not achieved. Above all, what was necessary was that "a brokenness of the heart [be] experienced, and that Divine Grace [enter] into the heart thus broken" (G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History* [New York: Dover, 1956], Part IV, Sec. III, Ch. 1, p. 424).

³⁵ Luther, "Freedom," in *Works*, Vol. 3 1, pp. 344-45 (emphasis added).

³⁶ See Joshua Mitchell, *Not By Reason Alone: Religion, History, and Identity in Early Modern Political Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), Conclusion, pp. 147-52.

man is in another "world," far from disputes about works. Only then "[do we hear] the Gospel . . . that Christ died for US."³⁷ This Gospel can only be grasped "with other eyes [than] carnal reason doth [have]."³⁸ For man to come unto this other dimension he must, like Christ, experience the abandonment of God that is confirmed in the call, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"³⁹ In this depth of abandonment Christ appears. (What, we may provisionally ask, can philosophy know of this abandonment?)

When the soul suffers abandonment, is exposed, and stripped of any lingering pretense, there Christ appears. Sin here is abrogated, taken in by the Byss of Christ⁴⁰--Ahe Ground beneath that abyss which utter self-condemnation occasions. In this abrogation, the powerlessness of man recapitulates the Arche of Christ's own suffering

³⁷ Luther, "Lectures on Galatians," in *Works*, Vol. 26, p. 234 (emphasis added).

³⁸ Luther, "Lectures on Galatians," in *Works*, Vol. 27, p. 86 (emphasis added). Cf. I Cor. 2:9. B.A. Gerrish notes that Luther accorded reason its place in matters pertaining to the "world," but insisted that "reason stumbles at the doctrine of the Incarnation.... not because reason refuses to believe in God, but rather [because] it does not understand who God is; consequently it invents a God after its own fancy" (*Grace and Reason: A Study in the Theology of Luther* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962], p. 14). As Hobbes (and even Rousseau, in the *Emile* [Bk. IV, p. 255, *passim*]) would later argue, reason concludes *that* there is a God (*quod sit Deus*), but not *what* God is (*quid sit Deus*). In insisting that reason cannot comprehend the mystery of faith, the labor of reason is directed entirely and with legitimacy toward the "world," Gerrish suggests. Luther's insistence that reason cannot understand salvation frees reason from a burden it is not capable of bearing. Tocqueville remarks about the peculiar way in which Christian faith and reason can work together and, in fact, argues that, unlike Islam, Christianity and Enlightenment are not contradictory impulses precisely because Christian faith demands that reason defer only in matters of salvation (see *Democracy in America*, Vol. 11, Part I, Ch. 5, p. 445).

³⁹ Matt. 27:46, Mark 15:34. From Psalm 22: 1.

⁴⁰ Byss: the alpha privative of abyss; it is the bottom underneath the apparently bottomless. The term is first used by Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), a Lutheran mystic.

and return to God; a Divine configuration of suffering and reunification is here "made flesh" again, and the mystery and great paradox of Christian faith ("power is made perfect in weakness")⁴¹ shown. Through a marriage with Christ ⁴²the bridegroom takes in the weakness of the bride in its entirety. The perfection of the bridegroom (Christ), who fought a "mighty duel" and conquered both hell and death, is, through faith in this moment of powerlessness, *given over* to mortal man-now Christian.⁴³ Here, God the Son draws the sin that utterly condemns the bride unto Him, and imputes a penultimate perfection back to the unworthy bride in virtue of this marriage with Him.⁴⁴ In unworthiness man lives though Christ; in this marriage across the chasm that separates what is stained from what is pure, man has an advocate who covers up his stain. The imputation that is so necessary is made possible only in virtue of his admission of unworthiness and experience of powerlessness.

It is not without want that I have traversed this mysterious territory. Luther's suspicion of philosophy stems from his view that it is a device, by which the gift of Christ

⁴¹ Luther, "Freedom," in Works, Vol. 3 1, p. 355. CC 11 Cor. 12:9.

⁴² This metaphor is found in both the Old Testament (Ps. 19:5) and New (Rev. 19:7-9). The marriage spoken of there was interpreted by the Church fathers to be the marriage between Christ and the Church, not between Christ and the Christian, which was Luther's interpretation. CC Mark 2:19; John 3:29.

⁴³ Luther, "Freedom," in Works, Vol. 3 1, p. 352.

⁴⁴ In the Divine-Human equation, then, human beings are the passive, feminine principle, while God (the Son) is masculine. This is further confirmed by Luther's insistence that Christian righteousness is passive righteousness, not active. CC Rom. 7:24. I note in passing that Calvin's theology does not emphasize this passive aspect of Christian righteousness.

may be circumvented, ignored, misunderstood, defiled. The imputation of faith offered what philosophy never could. No doubt Voegelin's understanding of philosophy was far more luminous than Luther would have conceded philosophy could be. We may argue about whether Luther was right to suppose exactly what Voegelin--indeed what St. Thomas--did not, viz., that reason is a pretense by which man claims to ascend to heights beyond his grasp. If the issue cannot be resolved, however, it can at least be clarified. Luther's claim was that the problem of sin was so grave that God Himself had to intervene directly into the soul of man. It was, moreover, only in the experience of exposure, nakedness, and humiliation before God that the mystery and power of faith shows itself.

Philosophy, however, knows no such embarrassment; its most luminous ruminations begin and end with self-satisfaction, even if such self-satisfaction is construed in the deepest possible sense. The smiling repose of philosophy situates the soul in a manner quite different than does the awesome catastrophe of sin. It was this that Luther never tired of emphasizing. Said otherwise, the pairing of sinful man and Redeeming Christ define the parameters of the human situation for Luther, and the divine-human economy can only be understood in terms of this pairing.

It would be incorrect, of course, to say that Voegelin wholly misunderstood the experience of exposure to which Luther alerts us. Consider, for example, the following


lengthy example:

The perspective of participation must be understood in the fullness of its *disturbing* quality. It does not mean that man, more or less comfortably located in the landscape of being, can look around and take stock of what he sees as far as he can see it. Such a metaphor, or comparable variation on the theme of the limitations of knowledge, would destroy the paradoxical character of the situation. It would suggest a self-contained spectator, in possession of and with knowledge of his faculties, at the center of *the horizon of being*, even though the horizon were restricted. But man is not a self-contained spectator. He is an *actor*, playing a part in *the drama of being* and, through the brute facts of his existence, committed to playing it without knowing what it is.... *Participation in being*, however, is not a partial involvement of man; he is engaged with the whole of his existence, for participation is existence itself. There is no vantage point outside existence from which its meaning can be viewed and a course of action charted according to a plan, nor is there a blessed island to which man may withdraw in order to recapture himself. The role of existence must be played in uncertainty of its meaning, as *an adventure of decision* on the edge of freedom and necessity."⁴⁵

The words from this passage that I have italicized, however, indicate that Voegelin has something in mind other than man's nakedness before God. In Voegelin's formulation, "participation in being"-a formulation familiar to Heidegger, but not easily adapted to Christianity--amounts to an exposure of the sort that requires an existential posture more akin to courage than to humility. There is "drama" and "adventure," to be sure; but these attributes of human action belong more to the Greek Cosmos than to the man who dwells in the world created in Love by the God of Abraham.

Moreover, Voegelin's debt to Greece does not end with his understanding of human exposure, but also carries over to his understanding of Christian faith-which is directly indebted to St. Thomas, and indirectly to Aristotle.

⁴⁵ Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, Vol. IV, *The Ecumenic Age* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974, Ch. 7, p. 314 (emphasis added).

True faith has an intellectual component insofar as loving, voluntary adherence to God is impossible without intellectual apprehension of the beatific vision as the *summum bonum*, as the end toward which man is oriented. . . . The relationship of amicitia is mutual; it cannot be forced through an  plan of human passion but presupposes the love of God toward man, an act of grace through which the nature of man is heightened by a supernatural form. The loving orientation of man toward God is possible only when the faith of man is formed through the prior love of God toward man.⁵⁴

Here courage does not make an appearance at all, for man need not stand heroically against the vicissitudes of being, but is rather *already* caught up in the mystery of God's love as the very precondition for faith. For Voegelin, faith is comprehended under the category of

supplementarity, just as for Aristotle (and for St. Thomas) an analysis of a set of virtues proper to man is supplemented by an analysis of man according to which what is highest in him is revealed to be *already* divine.⁵⁵ So comprehended, the domain of nature ("being"?) and the heroic virtue proper to it is not *indicted* by faith, as it would be for Luther, but rather *completed* because of it. The idea of an intact nature, which is supplemented by a divine love that is able to draw man toward God precisely because man's intact nature is a necessary precondition for the very reception of grace, struck Luther as a confusion about the gravity of the problem of sin. Moreover, for Luther, the *bad news* about man's sinful condition is the precondition for the Good News of the

⁵⁴ Voegelin, p. 250.

⁵⁵ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Martin Ostwald trans. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1962), Bk. X, Ch. 7, 1177b27-34: "[A life of contemplation, however,] would be more than human. A man who would live it would do so not insofar as he is human, but because there is a divine element within him.... So if it is true that intelligence is divine in comparison with human life, then a life guided by intelligence is divine in comparison with human life. We must not follow those who advise us to have human thoughts, since we are (only) men, and mortal thoughts, as mortals should; on the contrary, we should try to become immortal as far as that is possible and do our utmost to live in accordance with what is highest in us."

Gospel. Voegelin's formulation, by misunderstanding the gravity of sin, misunderstands the Good News of salvation through Christ. Because he comprehends "sin" in philosopher's terms, his faith is not the faith of the *believer*, but of the philosopher.

It would be grossly unfair, of course, to conclude from this that Voegelin was closed off to the experience of Revelation; indeed by virtue of his understanding that philosophy involves an account of the "mutual participation of man and divine,"⁵⁶ he confounds the distinction between philosophy and Revelation. For any number of twentieth century thinkers, perhaps most notably Strauss,⁵⁷ philosophy is that domain of questioning insulated from Revelation by a firewall that cannot be breached. Voegelin knew better. For him, the philosophical enterprise supposes already a linkage between man and God. Luther understood the grounds for such a linkage otherwise: only through a relationship sundered can a relationship be restored. History is replete with cases where both Voegelin and Luther's idiom have born fruit. And it may well be that among the other luminous mysteries of the Divine is the mystery that there are multiple possibilities of Encounter, in accordance with the limitations of and variations within man himself.

◆2. Luther and the Social Transformations of His Age

⁵⁶ Eric Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture," in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Vol. 12, Published Essays 1966-85*, Ellis Sandoz ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), p. 187.

⁵⁷ See Leo Strauss, *Athens or Jerusalem*

The conciliatory note on which I have just ended stands in need of further amplification. I have indicated already that Luther's insight about a new locus of faith comports with changing historical verities, and that any evaluation of his thought must take cognizance of the fact that when categories of experience are altered theological expressions will emerge that conform to those categories. This insight accords in some measure with Voegelin's own ruminations about the always-provisional articulations of the divine-human economy that register themselves in historical existence. Yet Voegelin would have thought that the formulation of the relationship between consciousness and being offered above comes perilously close to a Marxian interpretation of history, which he vehemently rejected.

The great noetic and pneumatic differentiations do not occur among Paleolithic hunters and fishers, but in ages of cities and empires; some social and cultural situations appear to be more favorable to differentiating responses than others. The structure of man's existence in society, thus, is somehow involved in the process of differentiating consciousness. Such observations must not be misunderstood as inchoate constructions of a casual relationship between civilization and unconsciousness. The thinkers of the Ecumenic Age who observe these configurations do not intend to determine a Marxian Consciousness by a Marxian Being. They are not immanentist speculators who degrade their consciousness into epiphenomena of technical discoveries; on the contrary, *they are quite aware of their consciousness as the primary instance that transforms their discoveries into historical events.* "

Any number of instances could be adduced to confirm Voegelin's reversal of Marx's formulation-Plato, Aristotle, Paul, John, and St. Thomas, among others. And because

50 Voegelin, *Order and History*, Vol. IV, Ch. 7, p. 306 (emphasis added). Cf. Karl Marx, "The Communist Manifesto," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Robert Tucker ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978), p. 489. "From the start", Marx says, "the 'spirit' is afflicted with the curse of being 'burdened' with matter" ("The German Ideology," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*), p. 158.

such a list *can* be adduced, the three questions that Voegelin poses remain as important as they are unanswerable:

- (1) Why should there be epochs of advancing insight at all? Why is the structure of reality not known in differentiated form at all times?
- (2) Why must the insights be discovered by such rare individuals as prophets, philosophers, and saints: Why is not every man the recipient of the insights?
- (3) Why when the insights are gained, are they not generally accepted?⁵¹

Having conceded, against Marx, that Voegelin is surely right about the extraordinary instances of philosophical irruption that can in no honest way be accounted for by the "epiphenomena of technical discoveries," the question can nevertheless be posed: might the epochal structure of history be comprehended in such a way that Voegelin is correct about the priority of

consciousness over being in one epoch and, say, Tocqueville (not Marx) is correct about the *reversal* of this order in what he called the age of democracy?

In the aristocratic ages, as the attention of historians is constantly drawn to individuals, the connection between events escapes them, or rather they do not believe in such a connection. It seems to them that the thread of history is being constantly broken as man crosses its path.

But the historian of democratic epochs, seeing the actors less and the events more, can easily string facts together in methodical order.

Ancient literature, so rich in fine historical writings, has not left us one great historical system, whereas even the poorest of modern literatures is swarming with them. Apparently classical historians made too little of general theories, whereas our own are always on the verge of using them too much.⁵²

Might the epochal structure that authorizes the three questions Voegelin sets forth

⁵¹ Voegelin, *Order and History*, Vol. IV, Ch. 7, p. 316.

⁵² Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 11, Part 1, Ch. 20, p. 495. From this citation Tocqueville's suspicions of Marx's determinist theory of history ought to be evident.

above, in other words, be even more radically disjointed than he allows—so disjointed, in fact, that his formulation of the activating power of philosophy is historically contingent, appropriate for one epoch, but blind to the verities that emerge in the one that succeeds it? In Tocqueville's words,

[The aristocratic and the democratic man] are like two distinct kinds of humanity, each of which has its peculiar advantages and disadvantages, its good points and its bad. One must therefore be careful not to judge the nascent societies on the basis of ideas derived from those that no longer exist. To do so *would be unfair, for these societies are so immensely different that direct comparison is impossible.*⁵³

To put the matter somewhat cryptically, was Voegelin, an *aristocratic man*, whose genius lay in the ability to illuminate the heroic possibilities of philosophy and, perhaps, to recover through one man's explorations (namely his own)⁵⁴ possibilities closed off by that modern deformation, Gnosticism? In being an *aristocratic man*, however, does his analysis of the modern age fail to take account of both its novelty and its character, the manner in which the civilizational stability of the medieval period could *not* comprehend the pace and scale of the dislocations that were to follow—all of which required new philosophical and theological formulations to account for the mounting experience of man dissevered from nature and thrust upon his own resources in order that he may make his way in a contingent and hostile world.

Voegelin sees the beginnings of this isolation of soul, if you will, already within

⁵³ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 11, Part IV, Ch. 8, p. 704 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁴ See Voegelin,

the medieval period he so admires:

The great wave of mysticism of the fourteenth century would have required the utmost skill of ecclesiastical statesmanship in order to channel the movement into institutional forms. This skill was lacking, and the mystics were derailed into heretical underground movements; this was why we date the decline of the church to 1300.⁶³

It is quite a stretch, however, to suggest that "ecclesiastical statesmanship" might have brought the errant mystics back into the institutional fold. It is more likely that the situation was beyond the capacity of medieval institutions or statesmen to comprehend. There was indeed a civilizational crisis in progress, but it was a crisis of a proportion for which there was no available measure. The mystics of the fourteenth century were perhaps the first clear signs of an emergent civilization, the measure of which we have yet to fully comprehend. What they register indicates that the Roman Catholic Church could no longer mediate the form or content of their religious experience. Tocqueville, rather than Voegelin, offers a compelling account of why this was so.

In democratic ages faith in positive religions may waver and belief in intermediary agents, by whatever name they are called, may grow dim, yet men are disposed to conceive a much more vast conception of divinity itself, and God's intervention in human affairs appears in a new a brighter light.⁶⁴

There are a number of indications in Voegelin's writings on the Reformation where he seems to understand that parameters of the social transformations occurring at

⁶³ Voegelin, p. 228.

⁶⁴ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. II, Part I, Ch. 17, p. 486.

⁶⁵ See Voegelin, pp. 228-29, where he mentions the appearance of the press and a "vast reading public"; p. 228, where he notes the development of independent towns; and p. 240, where there is a brief discussion of the emergence of nation-states.

the time," but he nowhere recognizes that these very factors were complicit in the emergence of the "individuation" that characterizes the democratic age. Nor can he, since Voegelin holds the force of Luther's personal will responsible:

For the moment let us only insist on the fact that *with Luther a new type enters the Western scene*: the individual who pits his strength against the world. We may speak of a diremption of the historical state of a society into the world of the community living in its streams of tradition and into an individual who fills a counter-world only.⁶⁶

Voegelin's disdain for Marx we have already seen; yet Weber--himself involved in an intellectual project intended to answer the myopia of Marx's vision --- understood that the social transformations of the times had to taken into consideration if Luther and the rest of the Reformers were to be fully understood.

A number of those sections of the old Empire which were most highly developed economically and most favored by natural resources and situation, in particular a majority of the wealthy towns, went over to Protestantism in the sixteenth century.⁶⁷

And let us add that Marx was surely not entirely off the mark when he notes that the developments that begin in the period with which Voegelin is concerned flower in the succeeding centuries.

Only in the eighteenth century, in "civil society," do the various forms of social connectedness confront the individual as a mere means toward private purposes,

⁶⁶ Voegelin, pp. 245-46 (emphasis added).

⁶⁷ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Talcott Parsons trans. (London: HarperCollins, 1930), Ch. 1, p. 36.

⁶⁰ Karl Marx, "The Grundrisse," in *The Marx Engels Reader*, p. 224.

as external necessity.⁶⁰

A wholly "material" explanation of the events and ideas in question need not be uncritically endorsed here; Voegelin, however, is so averse to any version of this possibility that he can only treat Luther, theoretically, as an emergent instance of pure will imposing itself on the world. The resonances of this formulation with a caricatured version of Nietzsche's *Obermensch* are obvious, and might certainly be invoked were it not for the fact that Luther arouses Nietzsche's ire precisely because he (Luther) is taken to be oriented, not by the ethic of nobility (where the will triumphs), but by the ethic of resentment (where the will can only will its own injury).⁶¹

Let us shift the direction of the discussion slightly here and ask this question: supposing that such a social transformation was underway during the period with which Voegelin is concerned, in what manner does this increasing individuation make its appearance in the realm of thought?

Because Voegelin adheres to the formulation that man's existence is *perennially* "Between," and that what pre-modern history shows are different variants of this insight, he cannot but conclude that the philosophical and theological registrations of the emergent modern experience of individuation are perversions of this primordial datum of human existence. Insofar as such modern registrations attend only to the nodal point of man, without reference to the relationship with the Divine in which man participates, they are indicted with the charge of Gnosticism.

⁶⁰ Karl Marx, "The Grundrisse," in *The Marx Engels Reader*, p. 224.

⁶¹ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, Walter Kaufmann trans. (New York: Random House, 1967), First Essay, ◆

There are problems with this typology, which I will consider momentarily. First, however, let us consider Tocqueville's assessment of this emergent individuation--of man, alone, cut off, and homeless in the world. More specifically, consider what he says about Luther, Bacon, and Descartes:

The sixteenth-century reformers subjected some of the dogmas of the ancient faith to individual reason, but they still refused to allow all the others to be discussed by it. In the seventeenth century Bacon, in the natural sciences, and Descartes, in philosophy strictly so-called, abolished accepted formulas, destroyed the dominion of tradition, and upset the authority of the masters.

The eighteenth-century philosopher turned this same principle into a general rule and undertook to submit the object of all his beliefs to each man's individual examination.⁶²

It is not difficult to discern the pattern that Tocqueville is observing here. The individuation with which we have been concerned appears quite early, but its full implications--corrosive, to be sure--are not yet expressed in Luther, Bacon, Descartes, and the others who followed. As social conditions became more equal and the aristocratic links that held men together were being broken, the resume of individuated man appears in a number of expressions (Luther in religion; Bacon in science; Descartes in philosophy)---but their formulations remained contained within the domains in which

⁶² Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 11, Part 1, Ch. 1, pp. 430-3 1.

they were "discovered." Thus, Luther could assert the equality of all Christians before God but condemn the peasants for their revolt.⁶³ Thus, Descartes could conduct his radical thought experiment without seeing its implications for the subversion of political authority based on tradition.⁶⁴ In democratic ages "[men are] continually brought back to their own judgment as the most apparent and accessible test of truth,"⁶⁵ Tocqueville says. We see this beginning in these formulations.

It is not the case, however, that Luther, Descartes, and the rest *are already* the radically individuated souls that Voegelin contends they are. Such souls *can* emerge only after a great deal more social corrosion has occurred than had at the time of Luther, Descartes, and the rest. That Voegelin has completely missed the nature of the process at work here is evident in his suggestion, cited at the outset of this essay, that Luther "was fundamentally concerned with nothing but the promulgation of his peculiar, personal

⁶³ See Martin Luther, "Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants," in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 46, pp. 49-55.

⁶⁴ "The power of judging well and of distinguishing the true from the false ... is naturally equal in all men, and consequently ... the diversity of our opinions does not arise because some of us are more reasonable than others but solely because we direct our thoughts along different paths and do not attend to the same things' (Rene Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch trans. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985], Vol. 1, Part One, p. I 11).

⁶⁵ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. II, Part 1, Ch. 1, p. 430. In the democratic age, Tocqueville says, "each man, is narrowly shut in himself, and from that basis makes the pretension to judge the world" (Ibid.).

⁶⁶Voegelin, p. 259.

experience and its imposition as an order of existence on mankind at large . "⁶⁶ Because Voegelin's point of reference is the ideal-type of the individuated soul that arrives on the historical scene much later, his analysis of its earliest expositions is, at the very least, prone to exaggeration, and more often is simply gratuitous.

Let us note the obvious derailments to which this central idea [of justification by faith alone] is exposed. With the atrophy of faith, the idea will degenerate in practice into the aggressive, utilitarian welfare society without culture of intellect and spirit that we know all too well. And theoretically, the tenuous connection with Christian tradition may be dropped altogether, and Luther's world-immanent love will become the altruism of Comte and his positivist successors.⁶⁷

Voegelin's typology, as I noted a short while ago, is predicated on claim that the modernity has immanentized the divine pole of existence, that it has collapsed the delicate pairing of man and the divine, expressed most eloquently in the Platonic idea of *Metaxy*, into the one pole that remains when man becomes willful and modern. The first problem with this typology is that it proceeds by what might be called "exposition by extrapolation." Because Voegelin is unwilling to concede that the ideas of modernity develop in concert with the changing historical situation, he is unable to see, for example, that the more radical ideas of Luther are checked by a series of tacit assumptions made by himself and others around him that render it impossible for his ideas to be a proto-Marxist or Proto-Comtean. What Luther is said to be revealed by what the inner kernel-or fragments,-of his ideas *become*. As a consequence, a perhaps well-warranted skepticism about how far the individuation of man has proceeded in our own day becomes the occasion for an unbalanced, and sometimes nearly hysterical, treatment of the modern author in question, in which the intellectual task becomes one of genealogical faultfinding rather than of sympathetic rendition.

⁶⁶ Voegelin, p. 259.

⁶⁷ Voegelin, p. 259.

The second problem of Voegelin's typology I take to be graver than the first. Where the first problem leads to an unbalanced analysis of modern authors, the second leads to a misunderstanding about the challenges of the democratic age in which we find ourselves. The first problem is analytical; the second is political.

Voegelin and Tocqueville are in agreement, formally, that man cannot long live without being drawn beyond himself. Voegelin's manner of addressing this problem is to become involved in an *aniamnetic* act, which supposes that human health may be restored through a philosophical act of recovery. Yet in some measure this philosophical task achieves its very nobility and purity against the background of the inexorable movement of modernity from its alternately naïve and audacious beginnings to the "civilizational destruction"⁶⁸ that follows. For all of Voegelin's protestations against the idea of historical necessity--say, as in Marx--there is, lurking within his indictment of Luther, a similar sentiment: once set in motion by its founders, modernity cannot stop itself from its rendezvous with disaster. In this light, the existential drama of the philosopher is to

⁶⁸ Voegelin, p. 238.

⁶⁹ *Plato, Republic, Bk. VI, 496d.*

seek "a sheltering wall against the storm and blast of dust and rain,"⁶⁹ even while he attends to his task of recovery. In the democratic age, Tocqueville says, "each man is forever thrown back on himself alone, and there is danger that he may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart."⁷⁰ There is more than a little irony in the fact that Voegelin's largely solitary anamnestic project of recovery--intended, if you will, to save the democratic age from itself--is itself implicated in the very disease it seeks to avert.

Tocqueville, like Voegelin, recognizes that individuation is a decisive fact of the democratic age. It is, moreover, a fact that must be modified if we are to survive. Unlike Voegelin, however, Tocqueville does not believe that *anamnetic* reflection can provide the corrective for the problem. There is, rather, a *political* antidote that must be administered to draw men out of themselves, namely, the presence of those mediational layers: local government and civil society.⁷¹ He proposed this resolution because he knew that going back was no longer possible: democratic man could barely imagine the enchanted world in which aristocratic man lived.⁷² Or, to put the matter in Voegelin's terms, democratic man cannot conceive of the idea of *Metaxy*, because the individuation

⁶⁹ *Plato, Republic, Bk. VI, 496d.*

⁷⁰ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, Vol. II, Part II, Ch. 2, p. 508.*

⁷¹ See Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, Vol. II, Part H, Chs. 2-8, pp. 506-28.*

⁷² See Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, Vol. I, Author's Introduction, p. 13*: "When royal power supported aristocracies governed the nations of Europe in peace, society, despite all its wretchedness, enjoyed several types of happiness which are difficult to appreciate or conceive today."

that has occurred supposes already a sundered relationship. The moral vocabulary of man had shifted; recovery was impossible--except perhaps for a few. If man was to be saved it would be through institutional mechanisms that transposed self-interest into self interest rightly understood. While more might be desired, no more than that was possible--though this was, in Tocqueville's view, enough.

◆3. Concluding Thoughts

Voegelin's assessment of Luther illuminates his intellectual program as a whole. His insistence that the object of philosophy was the *Metaxy* invites modern man to wonder about the alternatives that he has wittingly or unwittingly lost. Yet the primordially of this formulation in Voegelin's corpus, its universal application as the silent measure of all other formulations, leads him to misunderstand the new modality of faith that Luther exposit, one that comports with the individuation of man accomplished by the social transformations of his age. To be sure, there is reason to be concerned about the excesses to which such an experience is prone. Voegelin is everywhere intent on exposing these excesses. Yet it seems more plausible to believe that no univocal judgment can be rendered about individuation, for it can comprehend a range of phenomenon from solipsism and arrogance, on the one hand, to responsible liberty and human

dignity, on the other. In the post-War climate in which Voegelin writes perhaps his zealous attempt at diagnosing the pathologies that he witnessed was understandable. But as we move forward into a new century, it is more helpful, I think, for historians of political thought to attempt to discern the manner in which philosophy and theology comes to grips with this datum of individuation in the modern age, all with a view to attenuating its worst aspects, and cultivating its best features-for these do exist. Luther was not the cause of a "civilization disaster," but like thinkers in every generation he sought to give intellectual form to the swirl of historical forces that neither he, nor us, could fully understand.