

ERIC VOEGELIN, "COMMON SENSE" AND CENTRAL EUROPE

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An elementary fact in the history of thought is the emergence of philosophical schools around prominent thinkers. The disciples of a Master strived to preserve his work for the future, to carry through his basic intention and to continue in the implementation of the task pursued, but unattained by him in his lifetime. Nevertheless, there is another elementary fact in the history of thought: such schools did not last usually more than one generation. After some time the most talented disciples started seeing through the limitations of the standpoint from which their teacher approached philosophical problems and realized the unattainability of the tasks he had set for himself. At a certain moment in time they came to the conclusion that it was not possible to continue on the road marked out by him and that they were finding themselves at a new crossroads where they had to take new decisions, to unveil the open questions and issues behind all the answers the Master's philosophical "teaching" contained. By paradox, this moment of destruction of the teacher's legacy, however, does not necessarily mean its absolute end, its retreat from the human world and its fall into oblivion. On the contrary, it is exactly here where we can find the key to his potential immortality and this is the third elementary fact in the history of thought. Only when overcome and problematized, when - to use a figure of speech - struck from the heavens to the earth, does the philosopher gain his place in the dialogue engaged in by great, "immortal" thinkers across the borders of civilizations and centuries.

To guess at this point of time what place in the overall spiritual context of the now ending twentieth century will belong to Eric Voegelin (1901-1984), whether it will be namely he who will be given the credit for the fundamental shift in the sphere of political -thinking - as his disciples and followers seem to believe - would in my opinion be somewhat precipitous. At the same time, however, let it be stated that it is their merit that the open-ended process of Voegelin's possible immortalization has started. Voegelin is undoubtedly one of those contemporary thinkers who probably against their will and in spite of their own warning that philosophy will not allow itself to be closed into any systematic philosophical teaching - did create a kind of philosophical school. During his academic career in the United States and later in Germany Voegelin influenced decisively a significant group of philosophers, theologians, political scientists, cultural anthropologists, etc. - now finding themselves on the summit of their professional careers - who are convinced that the principal task of their own work is to keep Voegelin's philosophical legacy alive. They publish collected works of Eric Voegelin, organize Voegelin conferences and write studies or even whole monographs on him. They founded the Eric Voegelin Society, which holds since 1988 (?) annual meetings as a part of the annual conventions of the American Political Sciences Association.

All this demonstrates more than clearly that Voegelin was indeed an exceptionally successful and influential teacher and that his legacy represents a very powerful inspiration. In the course of years a global network of Voegelinians has been created, a chain of people as if united by a single philosophical will, sharing Voegelin's fundamental conviction that it is still Plato, Aristotle and other classical thinkers who should teach us what is (and what is not) philosophy; and that it is philosophy in this classical sense that remains the moment of contemporary European crisis as the single most important weapon to be used "in defense of civilization". The

aim which these contemporary Platonists (a kind of Platonic Academia operating in the post-modern environment of today's globalizing world) strive for, seems to be guided by a single intention: to initiate a Renaissance of classical political thought, to rediscover the liberating power of Platonic "ideas", to retrieve the dimension of philosophical dialogue for our current political discourse.

Nevertheless, time and tide waits for no man, first-generation Voegelinians have already reached their "acme", and one might pose the question of the further fate of their project. What will become with Voegelin's legacy in the long-term perspective, from the point of view of the dialogue of mankind across the borders of civilizations and centuries? I consider myself being definitely "Voegelin- positive", yet I think that in this regard the right approach to his legacy would be caution and prudent skepticism. Despite all the disciples' endeavour to disseminate the ideas of their Master, the "Voegelinian Revolution" in political thought, as announced in 1982 in a book of the same name by Ellis Sandoz (footnote), one of the most prominent American followers of Voegelin and today apparently the main guardian of the Voegelin legacy, seems yet to be completed. It is realistic and fair to admit that Voegelin's influence on the current political thought mainstream remains limited. This state is actually illustrated by texts on Voegelinian themes produced, presenting almost exclusively a positive, i.e. accordant interpretation of Voegelin's teaching. The fact that Voegelin is still usually presented in the role of great guru and unrivaled Master in the matters of thought, demonstrates that the destructive, critical phase of work on his philosophical legacy - the true test of his actual greatness and key phase of the process of his "immortalization" - has not yet arisen, and if it has, then it is evidently still at a very timid, initial stage. Where the Voegelinian debate and research will be, let us say, thirty years from now? Can we imagine that? Will Voegelin be still recognized as a great, truly "revolutionary" philosopher of the period at the great turn of history as his immediate disciples believe? Or will this image be whittled by the passage of time and Voegelin will be remembered "only" as one of those educated Central Europeans, born at a tragic time, uprooted from their domestic environment, living their lives on the periphery of the big world, leaving behind only faded photographs, collected volumes of their works, and gradually disappearing traces of their personal struggles, which were heroic and that is why respectable, but did not make a real difference from the point of view of universal history of spirit?

II. Escaping from Central Europe

Let us depart from the known facts of his biography (footnote). Erich Hermann Wilhelm Voegelin was born on January 3, 1901 in Cologne in Germany. In 1910 his parents moved to Vienna. This is where Voegelin received his education - first at the Gymnasium and then at the University of Vienna where he studied political science at the Faculty of Law with Hans Kelsen. International events led to a radical change of the Viennese scene during the course of Voegelin's studies. At the time of the monarchy Vienna had a relatively liberal, cosmopolitan atmosphere of a world metropolis. The defeat in the war, however, resulted in the disintegration of the empire and in the emergence from its ruins in 1918 of a republic, albeit one lacking the free republican spirit. The liberalism typical for the Viennese imperial era was replaced by petit bourgeois narrow-mindedness and grievances over historical injustice. Instead of cosmopolitan tolerance typical of the "world of yesterday" of the former rulers of Central Europe (described so

persuasively from a Jewish perspective in Stefan Zweig's autobiography) there was the rise of small Austrian chauvinism, xenophobia, ideologically motivated encounters of antagonistic social classes and general spiritual decline and loss of direction. There were, of course, deeper reasons for this transformation; it was not merely the hangover of military defeat resulting in the retreat from the position of power, but also the omen of deep spiritual and social crisis which in the post-war period started engulfing the whole European continent, culminating in the assumption of power by totalitarian political movements and resulting in the second world war. It was namely this shift that framed Voegelin's political experience and the elementary existential point of departure of his philosophy.

The academic environment - and Voegelin moved around almost exclusively in that environment - was, of course, relatively more resistant to the general decline. Reading in his autobiographical reflections about the way in which he planned his academic training, all the names of the people who taught him, all the places where he studied and the different disciplines, one cannot but be amazed by all the possibilities which were available to a young scholar, by the quality of contemporary spiritual life, and by the criteria of university education in the Austria of those days, a country politically and spiritually in decline. Nevertheless, the "decline of the West" (*Der Untergang des Abendlandes*), as clearly implied in Voegelin's reflection, was felt not only as a political problem, but was becoming increasingly apparent in the intellectual milieu, too. Maybe that is one reason why Voegelin's intellectual striving was so inseparably linked with private seminars held within a circle of friends calling itself the *Geistkreis*. The group included, for instance, Alfred Schutz, with whom Voegelin exchanged a written discussion of Husserl's phenomenology, as well as a number of others whom Voegelin later met again in American exile. The *Geistkrejs* was nothing more than a group of young enthusiasts who discussed everything that aroused their inquisitive minds, yet the mere existence and mission of the group reflected the shifts occurring in the world of Austrian academia, inconspicuously at first, but later moving slowly the centre of authentic intellectual life into the private sphere, still free from any manipulation by the state. For instance, Voegelin's "circle" included also Jews, for whom the prospect of any kind of university career in Austria with its growing anti-semitic trends was becoming unattainable - since the war not a single Jew had been appointed to the University of Vienna as full professor - and for whom the combination of philosophical interests and practical activities (there were lawyers and economists among them), which allowed them to enjoy financial independence and thus made them also less vulnerable, became indispensable. Of course, not only they but all other members of the group felt intuitively that intellectual life, if it were to survive, had to obtain more personal forms that could not be offered by institutions. In order to be able to preserve their intellectual integrity and to meet their intellectual tasks, Voegelin and his friends needed, at the least, a certain supplement to the offer coming from existing university routine.

Such a relation to philosophy, and to the He of the spirit in general, apparent from his first steps on academic soil, is quite typical for Voegelin and characterizes his whole career as a thinker. "Why philosophize?" is a question posed in the title of one of the chapters of Voegelin's autobiographical reflections, to which he immediately gives a clear and direct answer: "To recapture reality" ! (footnote) What is at stake is not therefore primarily the acquisition of academic distinctions or status, but ourselves, our ability to understand again what is happening around us and to us, to be able to challenge the decline engulfing contemporary European society

and with it dominant political thinking. Voegelin thus consciously upholds the classical Socratic tradition in philosophy - he does something quite uncommon in standard academic striving in the field of political philosophy, yet something that evidently brings him closer to similar Socratic thinkers of our times (including no doubt and of course the Czech Jan Patočka). Voegelin declares clearly the basis of his lifelong philosophical program: to regain access to classical philosophical questions that, in the Platonic manner, ask what is "good" (*agathon*); to involve philosophy in the struggle for openness of our minds (in the Socratic endeavour to achieve unity with oneself which cannot be achieved otherwise than by "care for the soul"); to present such an interpretation of the human situation and to formulate such a concept of human history that would correspond with the twentieth-century experience of mankind; to reflect on the current state of European civilization and, especially, to disclose the limitation and inadequacy of modern-age instrumental scientific rationality; to examine the spiritual pathology of the gnostic political movements active on the contemporary political scene and calling for the liberation of man from the burden of his past, which in their consequences, however, represent the most radical threat to human freedom.

That - and the student of Voegelin cannot fail to miss this point - is the reason why Voegelin approaches his philosophical task with such seriousness and existential urgency; why he assumes the role of someone who does not study the philosophical systems and thought of the past but engages in a dialogue with Plato, Aristotle and others as equals; why he often speaks in a voice reminiscent rather of Biblical prophets or Church reformers. It is namely this personal commitment, this absolute honesty of thinking, honesty drawing on the conviction that the matter at stake is not mere academic routine, but a struggle of life and death, the fight for one's own soul, that makes Voegelin a unique phenomenon on the spiritual map of today's world, that forms the source of his potential philosophical greatness, and that is also the reason why Voegelin has become - as mentioned earlier rather unwillingly - the founder of a school of philosophy.

As I already said, Voegelin received the core of his education from an impressive line of German and Austrian professors who introduced him to the world of European learning. A major influence in Voegelin's academic maturing was, however, his trip to the United States in 1924-1925. As a Laura Spellman Rockefeller Fellow, Voegelin was given his first opportunity to become acquainted with the American university environment and compare it with his hitherto European experience. The encounter with America became his destiny. This is where he encountered "common sense", which "spoiled" him, according to his own words, to such a degree that from that time onwards he was no longer able to exist non-problematically in Central Europe and within the framework of her venerable and cultivated philosophical traditions. Whereas the European discussion of political and social phenomena turned round in the vicious circle of contending philosophies and schools (mainly of neo-Kantian provenance) and de facto neglected the increasingly gloomy contemporary political situation, the American manner of political thinking was quite different. It did not lean primarily on one or another philosophical school and tradition but let itself be inspired by concrete political events, namely the foundation of the American republic, the adoption of its Constitution, which from that time onwards became the source of the "good life" of American citizens and whose further development and protection were generally perceived as the basic guarantee of freedom and human dignity. In brief, America presented itself to Voegelin as an amazing synthesis of the classical thought which he had striven in vain to restore in his Central European environment and of the best components of the

Christian tradition which European Modernism, in his view, was also desperately lacking. The pragmatism of William James and John Dewey, the philosophy of George Santayana, Whitehead's lectures at Harvard University, and also solid American theory of law or American Government theory, consciously resigning on the attainment of heights of philosophy - all that has such a strong impact on Voegelin that he returns to Europe - to use his own expression - a changed man, unable to exist further in the increasingly restricted, increasingly narrowing, increasingly philosophically sterile European environment.

Voegelin's philosophical diagnosis of the crisis of European civilization in the twentieth century, turned him into an open, uncompromising critique of emerging totalitarian movements and especially of national-socialist policy. His prestige in this respect, however, placed him at the moment of the Austrian *Anschluss* in immediate jeopardy. If it was originally his conversion to Anglo-Saxon "common sense", what made Voegelin, to quote to his own words, "unfit for further existence in Central Europe", it was German Nazis with their project of Thousand Years Reich, that forced him to leave Vienna and to become an exile. In March 1938 he flees under rather dramatic circumstances to Switzerland, and from there after a short time he departs definitely for the United States.

III. In Defense of Civilization

Voegelin left Vienna with a clear intention: to get rid of his Central European past and to build a new home in America. This decision, however, was not only an act forced by the adverse political development on the "old continent", but had, as I said, distinct philosophical underpinnings. Emigration to the United States not only closed the first stage of Voegelin's career. The conscious adoption of the American political perspective produced a shift in Voegelin's academic orientation. After spending some time on the East Coast and in Midwest,

Voegelin settled in the American South, first in Alabama and then in Louisiana. For sixteen years he taught American students at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. Among his topics one can find first the course of American Government, and later also the course of jurisprudence, which he conducted, as evidenced by Volume 27 of his collected works (footnote), in his own, i.e. philosophical way. But more than that: it was in this social environment that he began his extensive project aimed at fighting the looming decline of Western civilization; where he started to draft his version of the history of political ideas; where he began to formulate a new, non-dogmatic philosophy of history and to analyze the elementary problems of political order - always constituted within a concrete society and articulated with the help of the symbolism used by this society to express its always limited and always only partial understanding of the fundamental relation between Man and Being.

No matter how interesting it might be, it is not my intention to plunge now right into the depths of Voegelinian thought. The thing is that my theme in this article is primarily not the content, but rather the context within which Voegelin's philosophizing was taking place: the American brand of "common sense" having its point of departure in the American political experience. Why it was just the American "common sense" that alienated Voegelin not only from contemporary European politics, but also from a certain tradition of European political thought which became

dominant in the last three centuries, i.e. in the modern period of European history? Why it was just in the United States of America - in a democratic republic of the "New World" which took upon herself more than once in the twentieth century the burden to stand up in defense of the whole Western civilization against totalitarian barbarity having its origin on the "old continent" - where Voegelin rediscovered the liberating power of classical, i.e. pre-modern political thought?

To answer these questions, let us look briefly at the way in which the problem of "common sense" is approached by one of the great figures of American "Pragmatism", William James. In his lectures of 1906-1907 (published in 1907 under the title *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*) (footnote) James elaborated the following distinctions and definitions:

"In practical talk, a man's common sense means his good judgment, his freedom from excentricity, his *gumption*, to use the vernacular word, In philosophy it means something entirely different, it means his use of certain intellectual forms or categories of thought". (footnote)

What these "intellectual forms" and "categories of thought" are, was specified a few lines earlier: by "common sense" James understood "*our fundamental ways of thinking*", discovered already by "*exceedingly remote ancestors, which have been able to preserve themselves throughout the experience of all subsequent times*". used till now and forming "one great stage of equilibrium in the human mind's development". (footnote)

As appears from James's writings, the fundamental philosophical question analyzed by him is the problem of *noesis*, the problem of knowledge and knowing: What does it mean to know something? What kind of relationship is established between "knower" and "things to be known"? What ontology ("theory of being", Aristotelian THEORIA PERI TES OUSIAS) is commensurate with the world in which man is able to live as a rational being (*animal rationale*, ZOON NOUN or LOGON ECHON)? Can the classical philosophers who for the first time formulated the great ontological questions and discovered the fundamental ideas of our Western thought, help us in our efforts to understand better our contemporary situation and improve our capacity to use our own "common sense"? According to James, there are two ways how the problem of noesis can be approached: one is *monism*, which corresponds to the perennial philosophical quest for world's unity. The other is represented by his own pragmatic approach which adopts, on the contrary, the hypothesis of *noetic pluralism*. In his lecture "The One and the Many" James says:

"The *great monistic denkmittel* for a hundred years past has been the notion of *the one Knower*. The many exist only as objects for his thought exist in his dream, as it were; and as he knows them, they have one purpose, form one system, tell one tale for him. This notion of an *all enveloping noetic* unity in things is the sublimest achievement of intellectualist philosophy. (footnote)

The hypothesis of the universe's "oneness", the hypothesis of one world consisting of things seen by an omniscient knower "as forming one single systematic fact", the hypothesis of the actual world being present to the senses of a human spectator always within the finite horizon of his mortality, but "complete eternally", has obviously not only ontological implications. Its discovery and conscious acceptance signal a genuine revolution in the historical process of human self- understanding. From this moment on, any theory of knowledge, any plausible

answer to all concrete questions emerging from the fact that man is endowed with the capacity of reasoning - that he is able to distinguish in his own noetic activities between pure reason (dealing with matters of truth and untruth), ethical, i.e. practical reason (working primarily with the distinction between good and bad) and aesthetic reason (attributing the quality of beautiful and ugly to the things in the human world) - has no other choice but simply to take the "monistic" hypothesis into consideration. The "knowing" man must get rid of everything that does not comply with it. He has to leave, as if forced by its coercive power, his pre-critical past behind and to enter into a new universalistic era dominated and wholly permeated by his modern "science". In short: the necessary consequence of the "Copernican turn" made in European history by Immanuel Kant is the birth of the modern European spirit with its progressivist understanding of human history, the most important implication of which is the ontological degradation or even conscious denial of all human knowledge which previously was helping man to orientate himself in the world; the knowledge, which had accumulated in the course of centuries and was known as his "common sense" .

The stance of pragmatic American philosophers must be seen as a gentle and thoughtful rejection not of the value of Kantian arguments, which were praised highly by William James, but of that absoluteness with which the monistic philosophy was presented. Against the ontological hypothesis which enthrones the one Knower "conceived either as an Absolute or as an Ultimate", the pragmatists raise "the counter hypothesis that the widest field of knowledge that ever was or will be still contains some ignorance Some bits of information always may escape": (footnote)

"This is the hypothesis of *noetic pluralism*, which monists consider so absurd. Since we are bound to treat it as respectfully as noetic monism, until the facts shall have tipped the beam, we find that our pragmatism, though originally nothing but method, has forced us to be friendly to the pluralistic view. It may be, that some parts of the world are connected so loosely with some other parts as to be strung along by nothing but the *copula and*. They might even come and go without those other parts suffering any internal change. This pluralistic view, of a world of *additive* constitution, is one that pragmatism is unable to rule out from serious consideration. But this view leads one to the farther hypothesis that the actual world, instead of being complete "eternally", as the monists assure us, may be eternally incomplete, and at all times subject to addition or liable to loss." (footnote)

When we adopt a pluralistic view of the world, several fundamental things will change. First of all we will lose from our sight the systematic, i.e. static conception of *noesis*, seen by the one omniscient knower, consisting of individual pieces, the validity of which has been "scientifically" tested and which are assembled into a coherent, i.e. non-contradictory whole. Instead of that we will tend to focus more on the problem of *noesis* as a process; on the dynamic aspects of the life of mind we are part of, in spite of our finite bodily existence. We will start discovering the temporal dimensions of the fundamentally human situation which was discovered first by Socrates and two generations later philosophically analyzed by Aristotle , who defined humans as those who do not possess the divine knowledge of the One Knower, but are always striving to escape their ignorance they are aware of, because "by nature (they) desire to know." (footnote)

"Our minds (or knowledge as it is stated previously in the text, remark by NT) thus grow in spots; and like grease spots, the spots spread. But we let them spread as little as possible: we keep unaltered as much of our old knowledge, many of our old prejudices and beliefs, as we can. We patch and tinker more than we renew. The novelty soaks in; it stains the ancient mass; but it is also tinged by what absorbs it. Our past apperceives and co-operates; and in the new equilibrium in which each step forward in the process of learning terminates, it happens relatively seldom that the new fact is added raw. More usually it is embedded cooked, as one might say, or stewed down in the sauce of the old."

This figurative description of the process within which the human knowledge is acquired, grows and is altered in the course of time, clearly implies an utterly different, much more positive attitude of "pragmatist" toward the "common sense", than was the position of monism. At the same time, pragmatism has an incomparably higher appreciation for the singular facts given in the immediate experience of individual human beings, living in the presence of the known past, but open towards the unknown future. In short: pragmatism as a noetic stance is much more embedded in the concreteness of human life than in the abstract generalities apprehended by those who subscribe to a "monistic" school of thought. It simply respects the fundamental fact of our noesis, that the bulk of our knowledge is inherited from our forbears, from our family or tribe, from the society, culture and civilization we were born into. At the same time, however, pragmatism is ready to test the truths we received from the past and we believe in, against the changing realities of our life, against all these challenges we are exposed to as free human beings, who had no choice but to act on their own, to use their own capacity of judgment and to make, at the right time, the right decisions.

In this regard, the distinction made by James between the use of "common sense" in practical talk - as man's "gumption" and good judgment - and in philosophy which understands by "common sense" the "use of certain intellectual forms and categories" inherited from the past - is not that great as it might look from his own distinctions and definitions. Pragmatists are indeed sincerely interested and want to explore what are *"our fundamental ways of thinking - which have been able to preserve themselves throughout the experience of*

all subsequent times as customs or habits of thought, as our beliefs - because they are well aware that without these discoveries, sometimes of our *"exceedingly remote ancestors"* our capacity of good judgment and good action would be seriously damaged or even utterly paralyzed. Truth as the supreme noetic category and "good" as the basic orientation point of our practical life, come in the pragmatic perspective together again, bridging the gap between them and other "transcendentalia" (*esse, verum, bonum, pulchrum*), which opened in the Western civilization with the advent of the Modern Age.

"...Truth is *one species of good*, and not, as it is usually supposed, a category distinct from good, and coordinated with it. *The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good, in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite, assignable reasons.*

What would be better for us to believe? This sounds very much like a definition of truth. It comes very near to saying what we ought to believe: and in *that* definition none of you would find any oddity. Ought we ever not to believe what is *better for us* to believe? And can we then keep the notion of what is better for us, and what is true for us, permanently apart? (footnote)

To sum up in the context of analysis: It is this shift from the "monistic" perspective, which has long dominated the modern European thought, to the point of view adopted by American pragmatism, that can heal, according to Voegelin, our contemporary spiritual disease. It is so because the move from monism towards pragmatism opens the door again to the classical political thought which can help to restore the impaired balance of the European political mind. From the pragmatic perspective, one can rediscover under the conditions of modernity the classical Socratic question asking about the human good and making humans to "put their life under test" (DIDONAI ELENCHON TOU BIOU) (footnote), in the words of Plato's Apology of Socrates, and to engage themselves in the "care for the soul" (TES PSYCHES EPIMELEIA) (footnote); one can recapture for contemporary use the meaning of the classical concept of politics as a form of life of free human beings, the meaning of the classical concept of law, the only ruler capable of making all citizens equal, the meaning and scope of natural rights which are inalienable because they are not the product of human activity but have been established by God.

All this explains why "pragmatism" is a genuine American philosophy and why it is a pragmatic attitude that characterizes more than anything else the frame of American political mind. But more than that: It is my conviction that it was just the rediscovery and new "pragmatic" reading of Aristotle and of the other classical political philosophers by American "founding fathers", that served as one of the major spiritual inspirations for the American Revolution. (footnote) I cannot elaborate this thesis here and show in detail how much pragmatism reflects the daily American political realities, how much it corresponds to the very "soul" of American politics. I must limit myself here to the contention that it was nothing else but just this American "sour" - often uneducated and "primitive" from the point of view of sophisticated Europeans, or hidden underneath the colorful costume of American superficiality - that attracted Voegelin when he settled in the American South and was determined to launch a major philosophical counter-offensive against the spiritual bankruptcy suffered by the European civilization in the twentieth century, threatening to annihilate its fundamental values and political traditions.

Whereas the fundamental orientation of Voegelin's philosophy remained the same as in his Viennese period, the political circumstances of his work - Voegelin became an American citizen already in 1944 - dramatically changed. (The United States, according to Voegelin, was the only country which could save politically the threatened western civilization and whose reality at the same time offered a solution for that civilization's spiritual rebirth.) Whereas residence in crisis-stricken Central Europe called for an existence of a more Socratic type, life in America made him to adopt a Platonic perspective, trying to explore the phenomenon of the crises of European civilization in the full scope and with all ontological implications and to penetrate to the very heart of contemporary problems. In order to understand the blind alley where mankind was finding itself in the middle of the Twentieth century, and to help to cure that illness destroying the European spirit, Voegelin was ready to study the vast amount of material belonging to the

discarded spiritual heritage - both European and non-European - using not only all the instruments he brought with him to America from his Central European past, but also the American inspiration of "common sense" which served him as a beam of light in the Dark Times of the European civilization. Us task, however, was enormous. Not being designed as a regular academic project, but rather as an emergency operation in defense of civilization, it can evoke in the mind of a pessimist the memory of eternal punishment of mythical king Sysifos, or at least - in the mind of a more optimistically toned observer - one of the legendary heroic tasks of Heracles.

Relentlessly and earnestly, Voegelin tried to battle his way through the whole history of mankind, and finish his work on the new science of politics, on the new philosophy of history the central theme of which is the never-ending struggle within human society between the forces of order and disorder. What we see, however, when we examine the results of his efforts, is not the hero returning victorious from his battles, but an excellent, really profound philosopher whose results are endowed with power to generate insights. But alas, when they are built into an opus, they seem to be disintegrating in the author's hands. Voegelin returns humbly, again and again, to his point of departure and tries to embrace the accumulated material mastered with such unparalleled "bravura" into his grandiose thought- construction. Instead of the originally planned history of political ideas, he produces a study of the relation between history and order. But even this project he does not finish. The never-ending search for order (see the title of the short posthumously published fifth volume of Order and History) is increasingly invaded by the classical philosophical theme of preparation for death and meditation aimed beyond the sphere of ephemeral human affairs.

Nemo beatus did potest esse ante mortem. This Latin proverb - in fact originally formulated in Greek (footnote) - necessarily comes to mind when we are to explore the legacy left behind by Eric Voegelin. He died in 1984, i.e. sixteen years ago. Thanks to the enormous efforts of his disciples, we have now before us already a greater part of his philosophical work. And we can start balancing. With respect to what lies on our desk, would it be possible to claim that Voegelin succeeded in achieving his goal? Or, on the contrary, do we have to say that Voegelin was a great philosopher, had great plans, great ideas, but in the end, as all mortal beings aspiring to immortality, has failed?

IV. Return Home at the Beginning of a New Era?

The Second World War ended with the defeat of one of the arch-enemies of Western Civilization, and the United States, indeed, played the central role in it. However, the other enemy, Stalin's Soviet Union, came victorious after the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany. After a short period of illusions that the post-war international order could be built on democratic principles, the world was heading into the period of Cold War between the East and the West. in short: totalitarianism did not die in 1945. On the contrary, in its communist variety it was more alive than ever, claiming , even more aggressively, its "historical rights". The "defense of civilization" was still an urgent, and probably the most important task of contemporary philosophers.

After sixteen years in Baton Rouge, Voegelin accepted an invitation from Germany and, as an American citizen, moved back to Europe. Originally he considered that this would be the "permanent move", but it turned out that after spending ten years at the University of Munich, between 1958 and 1968, he returned, in early 1969, to the United States. During Voegelin's Munich period not only another generation of his students was formed, but he also took an active role in the German debate the major theme of which was still the problem of "denazification". However, no matter how strong and straightforward Voegelin's contributions to this debate were, (footnote) he kept careful distance from the contemporary trends in European political thought. He still considered America, with her political traditions and particularly her "common sense", to be the real home for his own intellectual projects and adventures. In spite of being back in Europe for most of the sixties, Voegelin never became a European philosopher again. In the last period of his life, he observed the European political processes from Stanford in California, where he was appointed as Henri Salvatori Distinguished Scholar in Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace and where he lived after his retirement. It is evident from his writings in this period that contemporary European politics was not at the center of Voegelin's attention; that his search for order in the human world was culminating rather in the milieu of ideas than in the midst of brute and often frustrating political realities.

Despite the fact that Voegelin's distance from his Central European origins in the name of "common sense" remained unchanged for the rest of his life, the principal thesis of my article is, that it is the success or failure of Voegelins return to Central Europe from his American exile, that might be one of the key questions in the debate concerning his philosophical "immortalization". In other words: it is nowhere else but there where one can find the proverbial Rhodos of Voegelin's philosophizing; it is there that his grandiose, truly "revolutionary" project of the "new science of politics", his never-ending search for order in human society, should come back to earth and be tested against reality. I would like to conclude this text by two remarks illustrating my point and intending eventually to draw several implications for the future of Voegelinian studies.

First thing to look at in this context is the reception of Voegelin's thought in Central Europe still in the "old" era of communism, namely the way, how he could be, and actually was, read within the "parallel polis" of Central European dissidents. They themselves did their own spontaneous search for "the order of history" as it "emerges from the history of order", pressed by the conditions of their "Babylonian captivity". They certainly were not all philosophers and lacked Voegelin's vast education and his talent to grasp the subject of his study in its full breadth and depth. But what they understood, as if naturally in their existential situation, was the Socratic point of departure of philosophical "action", necessary to defend and to restore in their part of the world the crisis-stricken European civilization. The political thought of these times, the questions and debates stirred by them, certainly represent an important Central European legacy intrinsically connected with the core ideas of the Voegelinian project. If Voegelin decided to leave Central Europe, frustrated by the absence of Central European "common sense", at least small islands of this thought have always existed there, despite local legal and political traditions, despite the crisis of European civilization in the twentieth century, despite the totalitarian attack on the very "soul" of Central Europe after the Second World War. The dissidents were simply

those who decided to stand up in defense of "common sense" and their struggle for human rights was simply confirming the basic conviction of Voegelin - that human nature, even under the pressure of totalitarianism, is unchangeable. In this context, it is important to mention that Voegelin had an important counterpart in Central Europe who shared with him the fundamental conviction as far as the role of philosophy in the life of human society is concerned: The Czech philosopher Jan Patočka, who became, together with Vaclav Havel, one of the first spokespersons of Charter 77.

My second and final remark concerns the situation after the collapse of communism in 1989. If Voegelin's work could offer an important inspiration to Central Europeans during the difficult years of communism, the symbolical return from his American Anabasis home to Central Europe, represents a task of great importance for the post-communist Central European political thought. The reason is, that it is, in my opinion, exactly the "common sense" that European politics needs at the beginning of a new era, that must be mobilized if all new challenges and questions which emerged in the sphere of European security, European integration, etc. are to be understood, addressed and resolved. What is at stake at this historical moment - at the moment when Europe definitely retreats from her hegemonic position in the history of mankind and the global human community becomes a political reality - is our ability to reconcile in our political thought both the American and European traditions. There is no doubt that it is Eric Voegelin who can serve here as a unique and maybe the key source of inspiration.

ATHANATOI THNETOI THNETOI ATHANATOI, ZONTES TON EKEINON THANATON, TON DE EKEINON BION TETHNEONTES. ("Mortals are immortals and immortals are mortals, the one living the others' death and dying the others' life.") (footnote) This cryptic fragment of Heraclitus, one of the pre-socratic "classical" thinkers admired and often referred to by Voegelin, expresses befittingly the enigma of relations between the philosopher and the world he had to live in and to understand during the time allotted to him on the earth. Let us be satisfied with this formula, when we try to make a connection in this text between Voegelin's possible "return to Central Europe" and his also possible philosophical immortality.