

Voegelin, Heidegger, and the Configuration of Historical Ontology

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It is probably well known among Voegelin scholars that one really could not get to square one with Professor Voegelin on the subject of Heidegger. In his autobiographical memoir Voegelin describes returning from the United States in the late twenties and having no interest in Heidegger's *Being and Time*: "It just ran right off," he says.¹ [1] Voegelin made the same point in a different way in a panel discussion at York University in 1978. He turned to a fellow member of the panel, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and said (with his trademark impish grin) that he had been unable to appreciate Heidegger's *Being and Time* because at the time of its publication he was returning from the United States and had been ruined by American common sense. Yet another expression of Voegelin's assessment of Heidegger stands out in my memory. In a question session on the occasion of the "Beginning and the Beyond" conference at Boston College in 1983, Glenn Hughes, picking up on the kinds of parallels between Heidegger and Voegelin that David Walsh has since enumerated in his introduction to *Anamnesis*, asked Voegelin about his thoughts on similarities between the notion of "It" reality and Heidegger's "*Ereignis*." ² [2] Professor Voegelin confessed that he had not pursued the study of Heidegger's later work because he (Voegelin) was fundamentally opposed to "the murder of millions." He

¹ [1] Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), p. 33.

² [2] David Walsh, "Editor's Introduction," *Anamnesis: On the theory of History and Politics*, trans. M.J. Hanak, *Collected Works of Eric Voegelin* (Hereafter, "CW") Vol. 6 (Columbia and London : University of Missouri Press , 2002).

found Heidegger's thought impossible to entertain, he said (again with that unnerving grin), because of its "murderous consequences."

Such remarks force us to realize that we cannot expect a patient review of the exact relation of Heidegger to Voegelin from the pen of Voegelin himself. As a writer who had decried the ambitions of Nazi authoritarianism from its early days, who had denounced in print the absurdity of the pseudo-science of supremacist race theory, and who had been thanked for his efforts by being forced to flee Austria with the Gestapo at his heels, one can appreciate why Voegelin had little patience for the task of sorting out just when, to what degree, for how long, and with what consequences Heidegger leant his intellectual and administrative talents to the service of Hitler's regime. Nor did Voegelin have a particular interest in determining what might be salvageable of Heidegger's fundamental ontology, or philosophical scholarship, or cultural and poetic meditations from the debacle of Heidegger's association with National Socialism, for even from the time of the appearance of *Being and Time* Voegelin had become unsympathetic to the German propensity to undertake vast analyses of cognition, consciousness, and human existence that abstracted and distanced themselves more or less thoroughly from the modern and cosmopolitan political demands that were pressing on all of Europe with dreadful urgency.³ [3] In his encounter with American culture and thought Voegelin had seen first hand the possibility of a democratic politics that was accompanied by a citizenry possessing democratic habits of character and cultural convictions. The issue that urgently pressed upon the German speaking nations, in Voegelin's view, was the question as to how to manage a transition to democratic

3 [3] On the tension between nationalism and cosmopolitanism in the formation of the social sciences at the time, see "Editors' Introduction" to Voegelin, *On the Form of the American Mind* (CW 1), ed. Jrgen Gebhardt and Barry Cooper, trans. Ruth Hein (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995) p. xiii.

society, given that the traditional precursors to democratization were sorely lacking in their recent history, and how to do so without a lapse back into authoritarianism and expansionist militarism.⁴ [4] Relative to such concerns, Heidegger's work of the 1920's would have to appear naively a-political, and his later enchantment by the black magic of Nazi propaganda would seem to be symptomatic of a thinker who had chosen the reality of esoteric ontology and the fantasy of romantic cultural conservatism over the reality of a burning need for a more deeply philosophical-political self-understanding in light of the international situation.

It must be a constant source of consternation for Voegelin scholars, then, that Heidegger receives a far wider range of attention than does Voegelin — not merely as a philosopher, but as a *political* philosopher. To cite just one example of this phenomenon, in the third edition of the Strauss-Cropsey *History of Political Philosophy* Voegelin receives not a mention whereas Heidegger is granted an entire chapter. What is the reason for this? The answer, I suggest, is to be found in that chapter's first sentence. "Martin Heidegger," it reads, "was the first philosopher since Plato and Aristotle seriously to consider the question of Being."⁵ [5] Though this sentence is painfully false (given that there were certainly at least one or two thinkers in the intervening two millennia who took the question of being quite seriously indeed), it nonetheless indicates clearly the nature of Heidegger's qualifications for the status of a political thinker. It is not that he developed a full-fledged political philosophy, but that his thinking in the area of ontology is so uniquely profound that the potential for building a theory of political reality upon it, along

4 [4] Eric Voegelin, "Some Problems of German Hegemony," *Published Essays 1940-1952* (CW 10), ed. Ellis Sandoz (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), pp. 69-70.

5 [5] Michael Gillespie, "Martin Heidegger," in Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, eds. *History of Political Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 888.

with the regular observations on the political struggles of his day that populate his works, grants Heidegger a place alongside the greatest political theorists of the Western tradition.

If such a fact causes the Voegelin scholar some frustration it also provides indication of the only potentially effective way in which a Voegelin scholar can critically respond, which differs, in some respects, from the way that Voegelin himself responded. No amount of invective against the perversions of Heidegger's Nazi period can, alone, influence the perception of Heidegger's relevance to political philosophy without also engaging the ontology itself, and doing so at some depth of thought. Whether one takes it as a fact in the sociology of knowledge or of the history of the Western philosophical canon, Heidegger has the reputation of being the least compromising of twentieth-century thinkers in the tradition of seekers after first philosophy. Any engagement of his thought, whether appreciative or critical, must come to grips with the core of that legacy.

I have chosen to call the issue around which I would organize this response "the configuration of historical ontology." "Ontology" is a word that was fully satisfactory to neither of these thinkers, for they saw the term originating in Christian Wolff's designation of sub-fields of metaphysics.⁶ [6] Yet the term serves as a useful point of departure inasmuch as each of them sought to shift the focus of the philosophy of being from the narrow and static confines of pure reason to the experientially rich field of meditations on the origins of reality that populate human history and that demonstrate, through the specifics of their historical situatedness, the concrete

⁶ [6] Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 41; *Gesamtausgabe* (hereafter "GA") Vol. 40 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann,), p. 44. Voegelin, "The Meditative Origin of the Philosophical Knowledge of Order," *The Drama of Humanity and Other Miscellaneous Papers, 1939-1985* (CW 33), ed. William Petropulos and Gilbert Weiss (Columbia, MO : University of Missouri Press, 2004), pp. 390-1.

historicity of all such meditations. I am suggesting that a potentially fruitful way for Voegelin scholars to approach Heidegger is in term of the exact configuration (to use a Voegelinian term) of this historically attuned and appropriated philosophy of Being.⁷ [7]

In attempting to grasp the uniqueness of Heidegger's ontological vision, I think it advisable to look some distance along the trajectory of his philosophical development to a period such as that of his "Letter on Humanism." From the perspective of this period, Heidegger's earlier projects can be appreciated as attempts to explore the question of the "being of beings" in a manner resistant to modernity's practice of hypostatizing being as "objectivity" in order to cleanse it of the stain of subjective consciousness, but they must also be regarded as being limited by existential philosophy's counter-tendency towards subjectivism or subject-centeredness. In the language of the later period, the primitive phenomenon that must function as the first, irreducible fact for philosophical wonder is the phenomenon of an "opening," or "lighting," or "clearing" in being by which the world and the things that inhabit it come to appear as they do and only through which the question of their being can be raised.⁸ [8] When I call this a "first" and "irreducible" phenomenon I mean that its recognition requires a demanding effort to resist seeing it as a quality of objects or of consciousness, or even as "being" in the sense of *ens* or *esse* ♦ the quality, or totality, or act of being. Every such conceptualization collapses the primary phenomenon of the lighting into something secondary, into what is disclosed rather than the event of disclosure ♦ into a philosophy of the entity called

7 [7] Voegelin, "Configurations of History," *Published Essays 1966-1985* (CW 12), ed. Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), pp. 95-114.

8 [8] Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," *Basic Writings*, 2nd ed., ed. D. F. Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1993) p. 229 (GA 9:325); "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," *Basic Writings*, pp. 441-3, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, 3rd ed. (Tübingen : Max Niemeyer, 1988), pp. 71-3.

"consciousness," say, or a philosophy of the person, or a metaphysics, or a theology of divine being.

Every subject-centered or metaphysical conceptualization, according to Heidegger, ends up valuing humanity for something less than what is uniquely definitive of us: our openness to the lighting, which is to say, the transcendence by which we are always already beyond every ontic quality that may be ascribed to us, a transcendence manifested in our irreducible ability to inquire of every such quality, "what makes this to be?" We can call this question the question of "the being of beings," but since the word, "being," is used in so many senses, there is good reason to refer to the task as "the thinking of difference," where "difference" denotes that which obtains between the primary phenomenon and every secondary phenomenon that it discloses.⁹ [9] Thus the paradoxical but nonetheless necessary challenge of all Heideggerian thinking is to interpret a world that is granted *only* as the inter-involvement of beings, but to interpret it *as* granted.

With the publication and scholarly analysis of Heidegger's early works and lecture courses we can see better than ever Heidegger's struggle towards an increasingly adequate way of articulating the two dimensions of this paradox. In the *Beitrage zur Philosophie* we can see some of the most adventuresome attempts to give the paradox its own language and something that one is tempted to call a meditative practice for invoking its tensions.¹⁰ [10] As result of our better access to a greater number of Heideggerian works in all stages of development, we are

9 [9] Heidegger, "On the Essence of Ground," trans. William McNeill, in William McNeill, ed., *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 105-6 (GA 9:134).

10 [10] Heidegger , GA 65.

better able now to appreciate why his late writings had to take the gnomic form that they did, a form that has delighted and frustrated readers with its captivating *aporias*.

It is necessary to insist that the paradox in which Heideggerian thinking finds itself requires as much meditation on the negative side of the question as on the positive. In part this requirement manifests itself as the need to prevent one from backsliding into reifications that forget what the difference demands ♦ reifications of consciousness that implicitly imagine it floating along the stream of time rather than being constituted to its very core by temporality; reifications of the source of the lighting (such as the "being" of metaphysics or the God of scholasticism) that render it something lit; identifications of ontological ultimacy with humanity, nature, or will. But there is also a deeper negativity at work, for it is of the very character of the "opening" of the primary phenomenon to open only so much, or of the "lighting" to light only so far. This finitude is not merely a quality that stands alongside the other definitive qualities of beings, but rather manifests itself as an ontological negativity constitutently latent in the being of every positive entity, every fact, every worldly event. It is this negativity that Heidegger emphasizes in his characterization of *Dasein*'s temporality as a coming-to-presence which, by the same movement, makes absent; it is this negativity that resonates in the Greek word for truth, *aletheia*, with its connotations of the *lethe* that the alpha-privative modifies but cannot eliminate; it is this negativity by which being must, for scientific minds, be conceived as "the nothing," and by which inauthenticity and "errancy" attain an intractable ultimacy in Heideggerian thought.¹¹

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11 [11] Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," *Basic Writings*, pp. 125-6, 130-2 (GA 9: 187-9, 193-6). For a summary of the place of the negative dimension throughout Heidegger's work (and with

The roots of Heidegger's strictness regarding this withdrawal of being in its granting of beings go back very far in his intellectual formation. Scholarship on Heidegger's development has revealed, for example, a strong influence of Luther's doctrine of the Fall, wherein humanity's sinfulness closes the door on any analogy with the divine.¹² [12] Or one may look back further to Aristotelian influences, such as Aristotle's notion that a thing "begins from its limits," or Aristotle's continual criticism of the Platonists for their practice of reifying the abstracted qualities of objects. But the thinking of finitude and closure-within-the-opening attains its uniqueness in Heidegger by acting as a pivotal feature of the configuration of a historical ontology. Being is not a steady ground of reality but is intimated only as it withdraws, through the intermittent granting that is appropriated in particular moments of finite existence and is cast as "meaning" in the comprehensive world views that define the discontinuous epochs of history.

In these features of Heideggerian philosophy one finds the basis for the specifically ontological divergences between Heideggerian and Voegelinian orientations. The existential situation in which the question of being emerges, for Voegelin, is one of a mysterious lack of self-grounding that makes us wonder about the source of our being. "Why is there something rather than nothing?" ♦ to quote the founding Leibnizian question to which both Heidegger and

reference to connection to Heidegger's Nazism) see William Richardson, "Heidegger's Fall," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* V. 69, No. 2, Spring 1995, pp. 229-53.

12 [12] See Sean McGrath, "The Facticity of Being God-Forsaken: The Young Heidegger and Luther's Theology of the Cross," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 2 (Spring 2005), pp. 273-90. See also John Van Buren, "Martin Heidegger, Martin Luther," in *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in his Earliest Thought*, ed. Theodore Kisiel and John van Buren (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 159-74.

Voegelin refer.¹³ [13] Like Heidegger, Voegelin cannot be satisfied with a single articulation of this wonder, but must regard it as a mystery that receives shifting articulations throughout history and must exist in any philosopher's thinking as a restless movement through attempts at articulation that must inevitably be revised over the course of that thinking. In Voegelin we have, then, another kind of attempt at historical ontology, an ontology that appropriates itself not merely as temporal in an abstract sense but as part of a historical struggle for symbolization of the situation in which thinking finds itself. This historical understanding of the ontological question looks much further back even than the founding of Western philosophy, for it finds no shortage of the same wonder in the compact symbolizations of myth-inspired cultures.

Functioning pivotally in Voegelin's interpretive scheme is the Platonic notion of participation. The finitude of human being is experienced as limited participation in a larger meaningful whole, the bounds of which, and the ultimate source of which, is obscured by that same finitude. By virtue of the structure of finite participation, "being" rightly functions not as a concept (for that would pretend it could be brought under conceptual control) but as an index towards which all characterizations of the mystery, and the world that issues from it, are oriented. For Voegelin, the notion of being as transcendent ground is not in danger of being reduced to a metaphysics as long as it continues to function as an index for the experience of participation.¹⁴ [14]

13 [13] Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (GA 40), Ch. 1; Voegelin, "On Debate and Existence," and "Quod Deus Dicitur," *Published Essays, 1966-1985* (CW 12), pp. 43 and 380.

14 [14] See, for example, "Reason: The Classic Experience," *Published Essays 1966-1985* (CW 12), pp. 265-91.

But for Heidegger this very notion of participation is itself an instance of metaphysics, and Voegelin's "ground" would have to count as a ground in the being that is "opened" or "lit" rather than the "opening" or "lighting" that can only be thought of, in the strictness of the withdrawal of being, as groundlessness or abyss (*Abgrund*).¹⁵ [15] There is perhaps no idea so fundamental to the history of Western philosophy that is so strikingly minimized in Heidegger's thought as the Platonic notion of participation. I suspect this may be due to an early and thoroughgoing influence of Aristotle, for Aristotle saw the rejection of participation (which he called an empty metaphor) as a crucial means of distinguishing his metaphysics of embodied substances from the Platonic practice of granting greater reality to invisible form than to visible instantiations. One who is thoroughly immersed in Aristotelian thought can have difficulty in grasping the very question that drives Platonic thinking from beginning to end. This question is not Aristotle's question, which is, "What is the makeup of individual substances?" Plato's question is, rather, "how can it be that individuated substances can be intelligibly similar to one another?"

Note that in recalling this contrast between Plato and Aristotle I am not trying to turn Voegelin and Heidegger into Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysicians, for each of them is seeking to move beyond metaphysics. But one can only move beyond the metaphysics that one understands metaphysics to be. Heidegger, understanding the being-quality of beings as beginning at their limits, must move beyond being-ness by a more profound thinking of the nature of "limit." To see the history of being as negatively conditioned by limit, by *lethe*, is to emphasize its inter-mittence, or in other words, the discontinuity among the ways of grasping the

15 [15] Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, pp. 2-3, 93 (GA 40:4-5, 100).

world in different historical epochs.¹⁶ [16] Voegelin, understanding finite being on the model of participation, seeks to move beyond metaphysics by conceiving being as intelligibility that transcends all conceptualizations or symbolizations of it. While he, like Heidegger, sees an extraordinary difficulty in identifying equivalences among historically different forms of symbolization of existential experiences, he is more inclined than Heidegger to seek those equivalences among meanings that are immanently intimated through our participation in them and that transcend our participation in the direction of fullness rather than nothingness.¹⁷ [17]

Now let us ask, could we find our way from these philosophical divergences to a Voegelinian critique of Heidegger's philosophy that focuses squarely on the ontological issue while implicating also the other dimensions? There are, of course, a variety of obstacles. One could not get to square one with Voegelin on the subject of Heidegger because the political concerns that divided them were already limiting Voegelin's interest in Heidegger by the late twenties. Voegelin had been "ruined" (in the language of his witticism to Gadamer) by the realization, in the study of American thinkers, that democratic politics was capable of aspiring to something more than the instrumentalism of bureaucracy and a godless religion of humanity. That German-speaking nations were saddled, by that time, with a democratic system in the absence of the intellectual traditions or practical habits of a democratic culture was a fact that Voegelin considered a cause of dangerous political instability. In light of that concern, condemnations of liberalism in the name of German tradition could signify to Voegelin nothing

¹⁶ [16] My mention of "inter-mittance" follows William Richardson's means of translating Heidegger's variations on "*Geschick*," in *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, 3rd ed. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), pp. 533-4.

¹⁷ [17] Voegelin, "Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History," *Published Essays 1966-1985* (CW 12), pp. 115-33.

but blindness to the urgent reality of the political situation. Heidegger's early support for, and then increasingly conflicted collaboration with, Hitler's regime could only be seen, from such a perspective, as a susceptibility to romantic traditionalist illusions that conservative "a-political" intellectuals were, at the time, especially prone. The argument that it was difficult to recognize, in the thirties, Hitler's true significance or his exact intentions rings hollow when one considers that during that same time Voegelin was preparing the scholarly critiques of Nazi race theory and authoritarianism that led to his being drummed out of Austria. It was difficult for Voegelin, in the 1930s to see how anything but foolishness or malevolent delusions could cause one to dismiss the "beating of a few Jews" as isolated incidents rather than the announcements of murderous intentions on a grand scale.

For these reasons there exists an impasse in any attempt to move from a comparison of Voegelin and Heidegger on specifically ontological questions to a Voegelinian view of Heidegger's philosophy as a whole. The separation of the ontology of Heidegger the thinker from the politics of Heidegger the historical agent was once a fairly straightforward interpretive issue for Heidegger scholars. Today it requires the delicacy of a skilled craftsman, for one can no longer simply disown Heidegger's Nazism but must demonstrate how one actively and effectively opposes it.¹⁸ [18] And it requires the delicacy of a surgeon if one is to go so far as to attempt to draw political-theoretical implications from Heidegger's ontology that are independent from Heidegger's own politics. Few have done just that with so deft a hand, I

18 [18] By this I do not mean to claim as decisive for scholarship the merely defamatory works that have been published on Heidegger, but the scholarly studies that have followed upon them, such as Hugo Ott's, *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life*, trans. Allan Blunden (New York: Basic Books, 1993) and Richard Wolin's collection of documents, *The Heidegger Controversy*, ed Richard Wolin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993). Many other works could be cited.

should say, as Fred Dallmayr has in his book, *The Other Heidegger*.¹⁹ [19] Dallmayr looks particularly to the period of the late 1930's, when Heidegger's support for (and by) the Nazis was waning. There he finds in such sources as Heidegger's lecture course on Schelling a meditation on the meaning of freedom, wherein Heidegger steers the notion of freedom away from Schelling's metaphysics and toward a basis in the granting-withdrawing structure of his own notion of being, thereby producing an idea of freedom that stands on a par with liberalism, but that possesses the ability, perhaps (because of its grounding in something deeper than modern philosophies of the person), to respond to the cries for freedom that are issued in the world today *against* the West (or the North) as much as within it.²⁰ [20] Dallmayr even, in an earlier section of his book, draws upon Voegelin's *New Science of Politics* to assist in understanding the problem of representation that is at stake in the debate between democracy and other forms of rule.²¹ [21]

It is difficult to imagine Voegelin himself, however, having any patience whatsoever with scholarly efforts of retrieval such as these. Still, just as a project like Dallmayr's seeks not to pass a test of Heideggerian orthodoxy but rather to realize a potential in Heideggerian thought that Heidegger himself could not fully bring to fruition, so we are free to imagine what might be a characteristic Voegelinian appreciation of what is worth appreciating in Heidegger if, *per impossible*, Voegelin had shown the patience with Heidegger that he did, say, with Nietzsche's complex influences on German politics, or with the failure of principles of Christian humanism

19 [19] Fred Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

20 [20] Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger*, Ch. 4.

21 [21] Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger*, pp. 79-87.

to keep the German churches from supporting Hitler.²² [22] I imagine that a more patient Voegelinian assessment of Heidegger would resemble the respect that Voegelin showed for many thinkers and writers (such as Nietzsche, Camus, or Musil) who were particularly adept at articulating the spiritual poverty of their age even though they never escaped being also a symptom of it. In this light a Voegelinian can grant that Heidegger was unusually perceptive in his recognition of the inability of modernism to respond to the full range of human longings that one finds in ancient and traditional cultures. Heidegger accurately perceived that the deepest questions of the philosophical tradition were being oppressed by the triviality of modern solutions to living that were infusing the great cultures of Europe with the spirit of the "last man" that Nietzsche had so famously satirized. Heidegger frequently opposed the way that modernity's world-picture easily translates into the will to domination and control, and Dallmayr's retrieval emphasizes the potential for a philosophy of "letting beings be" to be just the opposite of that.

But the differences in basic philosophical orientations between Voegelin and Heidegger would here yield an unavoidable disagreement on the ontological grounds of worldly humility. For Voegelin, humility is a function of the recognition of the transcendence of the ultimate meaning of being, and for him the symbolization of transcendence is the proper alternative to symbolizations that promote domination. It is when meaning is immanentized, when mortal

22 [22] Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans* (CW 31), trans. and ed. Detlev Clemens and Brendan Purcell (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999), Chs. 4 and 5.

powers must be burdened with the whole of ultimate meaning that the aspiring *libido dominandi* can hope to embody that ultimacy, and to do so in political form.²³ [23]

Voegelin had difficulty in seeing Heidegger's effort to preserve a meaning for transcendence within the context of the radical negativity of his philosophy as anything but a transcendence ultimately confined within immanence. In *Hitler and the Germans*, in a section entitled, "Nonexperience of Transcendence Leading to Dehumanization," Voegelin refers to "Heidegger's attempt to claim the expression 'existence' for the transcending being of man" as a kind of "compromise."²⁴ [24] A compromise of what? On the surface he means a compromise between "existence" as it is applied to mundane entities and a definition of "existence" that would include the eternal being of the divine. But the more incisive reading of the statement comes forward when we realize that in speaking of the "compromise" Voegelin is referring to what I have called Heidegger's paradox: the placement of orientation to the ground of being at the heart of philosophy while denying philosophical legitimacy to almost every form of positive thinking on that ground. For Heidegger this combination of demands necessarily follows from the discovery of radical limitation in every approach to the question of being. But Voegelin's suspicion is that too many of these limitations are legislated by Heidegger rather than discovered. Voegelin and Heidegger agree that philosophy stands before mystery, but they disagree regarding the shape that mystery takes as one stands before it, and where, in fact, it begins. They agree that Leibniz's question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" is foundational for every sort of philosophical inquiry, but Voegelin wishes that Heidegger had paid more

²³ [23] See Glenn Hughes, *Transcendence and History: The Search for Ultimacy from Ancient Societies to Postmodernity* Columbia , MO : University of Missouri Press, 2003).

²⁴ [24] Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans* (CW 31), p. 261.

attention to the Leibniz's companion question ♦ Why is there this and not something else? ♦
which is the question of the order in the existing universe as it relates positively to its ground.²⁵
[25]

As a result, Heidegger's position cannot connect him, Voegelin would say, with a vast array of symbolizations of the primary experience of the cosmos that populate the several millennia of known human history, for every one of them fails to think the negativity of being to the radical degree that Heidegger has thought it, and any one of them can at best be valued to the extent that it can approximate, or be retrieved, in accordance with requirements of Heideggerian thought. Hence, while Heidegger's is most definitely an ontology of historicity, it fall short of what Voegelin would expect of a truly historical ontology, for such an ontology would put its own symbolizations on a par with myriad symbolizations that have emerged in history of worldly existence as it stands before the mystery of the beginning and the beyond. It would avoid, as much as possible, the temptation to give itself a consummating or revolutionary position at the end of history (what Voegelin calls "historiogenesis"), which Heidegger's ontology does not, at least not to a sufficient degree.²⁶ [26]

On the level of pure interpretation of ideas, one could certainly argue with this Voegelinian assessment of Heidegger. But given that Voegelin's chief condemnation of immanentism and historiogenesis is their tendency to endow sinful human beings with godly

25 [25] Voegelin, "On Debate and Existence," *Published Essays 1966-1985* (CW 12), pp. 43-4.

26 [26] Voegelin, *Anamnesis* (CW 6), Ch. 5; *The Ecumenic Age* (CW 17), ed. Michael Franz (Columbia , MO : University of Missouri Press, 2000), Ch. 1.

powers and to fall under the spell of the magic of the extreme, one would at least have to acknowledge that the circumstantial evidence in this dispute weighs heavily in Voegelin's favor.

My purpose here, however, is not to undertake the extensive work that would be necessary truly to test Heidegger against these Voegelinian charges, nor, for that matter, to claim to exhaust the possibilities of a Heideggerian response. My point is simply to emphasize that while the ontological content of Heidegger's thought need not be (and ultimately, perhaps, cannot be) separated from the political realities of Heidegger's life, still, no critique of Heidegger ♦ Voegelinian or otherwise ♦ can critique Heidegger's political actions in isolation from the import of his ontology and trust that it will make any difference to the assessment of Heidegger, in general, as a thinker ♦ and indeed, as a political thinker.
