

Eric Voegelin and Reflexive Historical Sociology*

Copyright 2006 Peter McMylor

◆the balancing act cannot be achieved once and for all, a thinker must remain aware of his consciousness as permanently engaged in balancing the structuring forces, in the personal, social, and historical dimensions of the process. And finally to be aware of the truth of reality as an image emerging from a balancing process means to remain aware of the tension between the balanced image and a power of imagination, which is necessary to achieve symbols of truth at all◆

Eric Voegelin, from ◆Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme', in *Published Essays 1966-1985, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol.12. Ed. E.Sandoz, 1990, p.327

The sociologist Arpad Szakolczai ◆ well known to many at this conference- but not yet so well known amongst the wider readers and practitioners of social theory is the author of a significant and cumulative body of work. In particular three interrelated volumes on some now canonical and other less canonical theorists not least amongst these is Eric Voegelin. These volumes are *Max Weber and Michel Foucault: Parallel life-works*,(1998) (from herein MWMF.), *Reflexive Historical Sociology*, (2000)(here after as RHS, for a brief summary see Szakolczai, 1998c) and most recently, *The Genesis of Modernity* (2003)(here after as GM) and despite authorial claims about them each being stand alone studies they are-with the partial exception of the first volume MWMF,- best understood as three parts of a closely integrated single project.

At its heart this project proposes a radical reorientation of sociological theory around the nature of the intellectual practice of producing social thought. The volumes defiantly restate the overwhelming significance of the theorist for the theory produced. They cover in some detail a wide range of thinkers, in addition to lengthy engagement with Weber and Foucault who along with Eric Voegelin have pride of place in the work , the other theorists, are Norbert Elias, Lewis Mumford, and Franz Borkenau are discussed mainly in RHS. Weber and Foucault are of course discussed in detail in MWMF but two of their works, considered exemplary by Szakolczai, *The Protestant Ethic* and *Discipline and Punish* have chapters devoted to them in RHS, whilst in GM about a third of the volume is devoted to the main three figures-

Weber, Foucault and Voegelin and the potential for the application of their work to be used in contemporary scholarship.

In what follows I will explore the creative use that Szakolczai puts Voegelin to- in relation with other thinkers -in developing his innovative life-works method but also, all too briefly, point to some difficulties in his substantive analysis of especially the later Voegelin in relation to what might be understood as the conventional modernist agenda of sociology. In doing this it should be noted that I neglect large areas of Szakolczai's discussion of Voegelin such as the extensive critical account of his understanding of Plato in GM chapter six which call very much for scholarly attention.¹ [1]

It is important to grasp from the start what the motivation for such an enterprise of interconnected interpretation of this variety of thinkers and their work. Exposition and interpretation are worthy and worthwhile exercises, but more than that is intended here. The key can be found in the conclusion to the latest volume GM and the issue of globalisation. As Szakolczai. notes it is now generally acknowledged that ♦the modern "global age" has its antecedents in another period of "globalisation" that started about two-and-a-half millennia ago, in the "axial age", and ended with the collapse of the Roman Empire, about a thousand years later. This was not simply an age of empires, but of empires that strove for world domination, trying to conquer the entire inhabited planet, and thus they had "ecumenic" ambitions'. (GM. P.241). (see also D.Ingliss and R.Robertson, 2004, 2005) However two areas seemed to also initiate what can be understood as serious exercises of resistance: Greece and Israel. In both cases the resistance was in part political but also and more significantly in the realms of thought and spirituality and in the disciplines and the techniques of ways of life. At the heart of Szakolczai's project is a concern with the continuing significance of these practices in the new age of globalisation,

¹ [1] This is a crucial issue in respect of aspects of the following argument- but beyond my competence to settle- because one of the central shortcomings of Voegelin's work for Szakolczai is concerned with Plato, as he put in it ♦It was with Plato that his ideas had the greatest affinity; thus according to the anamnestic methodology, Plato had to take up a central point in his own work. The problem, however, is that that Plato's thought had little direct effective impact; to make matters even worse, this impact was strongest on the various "Gnostic" systems of thought. This implied, on the one hand, that Voegelin could not pose properly the question effective impact of Christianity, in other words why and where did Christianity succeed where Plato did not; and, on the other hand, starting from Plato as the measure, it became impossible to diagnose properly those elements of Plato's thought that showed affinity with Gnosticism'. (GM,p.64)

not least in the way these elements live on in the practice and understanding of reflexive historical sociologists.

◆METHOD', THE SHAPE OF LIVES

Before dealing with the issue of ◆method' proper something needs to be said about the meaning and choice of the term ◆reflexive historical sociology' as a description of Szakolczai's enterprise. The three words ◆reflexive historical sociology' denote three major dimensions of the approach: reflexive alluding to a type of philosophical tradition, sociology a domain of empirical science with the term historical operating as a qualifying term that excludes traditions of sociological formalism. On the face of it the term could look just like one more appeal for more interdisciplinary work in which synthesis of approaches is seen as providing greater intellectual reach. However Szakolczai is quite emphatic in rejecting such an interpretation, as he puts it, ◆Reflexive historical sociology as a discursive formation is not a synthesis of sociology, philosophy and history but a special "figuration"- he follows Elias, (Elias, 1978)- ◆fulfilling a series of conditions. It has a concrete, empirical and experiential footing in contemporary life, avoiding both mere philosophical speculation and copy of the natural sciences.'(MWMF, p.15) The animating focus of Szakolczai's self consciously sociological analysis is the investigation of modernity. However as he goes on to argue the empirical basis of the investigation cannot remain within the realm of purely contemporary evidence it must involve what he terms ◆a historical-interpretative dimension',(ibid) other wise it would be impossible to decide what aspects are due to modernity and what belong to the pattern of long term human existence. However the historical dimension of the analysis must not stop here but has to be given a theoretically informed sociological focus around the issue of processes of continuity or dislocation in what Szakolczai terms the ◆fundamental "ordering codes" of society which in any concrete empirical study remain taken for granted. However the bringing to the surface of possibly hidden or taken for granted assumptions gives to the fully articulated practice of reflexive historical sociology what Szakolczai terms ◆quasi-prophetic qualities, and this poses a special problem concerning the conditions that enable somebody to obtain this kind of in-depth knowledge.'(ibid) It is here that the issue of the relation of the life to the work takes its initial saliency for Szakolczai and requires a full blown methodology for exploring the condition of this genuinely reflexive knowledge.

At the centre of Szakolczai's method is the issue of experience, especially the experience of the scholar/theorist and it is in the creative exploration of this particular type of life-experience that a

significant part of the real originality of his work lies. To explore this he brings to bear a remarkable synthesis of philosophical, sociological and perhaps most tellingly anthropological approaches on the biographical data of the author. The most significant sources here for his approach are to be found in the works of Eric Voegelin,² [2] (who is both a source for the method and a subject of analysis) the anthropologist Victor Turner, the ancient historian Pierre Hadot and the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey. All of them in different ways contribute for Szakolczai to a new or more precisely a renewed understanding of experience which takes us beyond the essentially positivistic understanding of the modern Cartesian era.

What does Szakolczai understand by Voegelin's emphasis on experience? The conceptual use of the term experience by Voegelin as a category of social explanation stems from his deep dissatisfaction with his and other attempts to produce a history of political ideas as *qua* ideas. (see E.Voegelin, 1997-1999) He was eventually to argue that the language of political ideas had to be grasped as the symbolization of engendering experiences which were themselves events within the historical field. (for full details see Szakolczai, 2001) As Szakolczai notes that in the History of Political Ideas, 'interest in in-between periods of disorder, disorientation, spiritual disintegration or transition is omnipresent' and the strong role of sentiments and experiences in producing symbolisations were based 'on real feelings of anxiety generated in human beings actually undergoing a period of dissolution of order..' (ibid,p355) What ever the idea-symbols future history its roots were to be found in real human experiences and crucially these real human experiences were those which in the broadest sense had been undergone by the author or theorist. The theorist for Voegelin was rooted in society and the theorist's work of symbolization was it self an event in the conscious life of the society and could in certain circumstances go on to have massive consequences.

For Wilhelm Dilthey the issue of experience was also crucial. He sought to supplement Kant's three great critiques of pure and practical reason and judgement with a critique of historical reason. For Szakolczai the significance of this is the focus on the weaknesses of Kant's category of experience (Erfahrung) with its claim that experience is basically unstructured and incomprehensible without the categories supplied by the transcendental mind. Szakolczai has gone on point out more recently that,

² [2] For Voegelin's relationship with sociology see W.Petropolis Eric Voegelin and German Sociology, Manchester Sociology Occasional Papers)

◆Dilthey's entire work was based on the opposite hypothesis: human experiences do have a structure on their own. The task of the interpreter is not to impose an external order on experience, rather to elucidate their internal, real, existing structure. In order to indicate this fundamental difference, Dilthey came up with a new concept, hardly used before in German: *Erlebnis*, or "lived experience".' (Szakolczai, 2004, p.65)³ [3]

However for the fragmentary work of Dilthey and the theoretical conceptions of Voegelin to become sociologically meaningful for Szakolczai they needed decisive supplementation from two rather surprising disciplinary sources. These were the work of Pierre Hadot, the ancient historian and, most decisive of all, Victor Turner the social anthropologist. Pierre Hadot's work was very significant as he along with a range of other scholars, including some very important figures for Szakolczai such as Jan Patocka, (see Szakolczai, 1994a, 1994b, J.Patocka, 1999, J.Patocka, 2002,) have recovered the largely lost sense of what the actual practice of philosophy had meant in the ancient classical world, that is the idea of ◆'Philosophy as a Way of Life', which formed the title of one of Hadot's most significant works, and of course a significant influence on Michel Foucault (see P.Hadot, 1995)

What Hadot pointed to was the role played by a variety of ascetic practices, including meditative exercises and disciplines orientated towards the transformation of the self in the practice of the philosophical life. In so doing he opened up a range of issues about the relation between what since the enlightenment had seemed to be the clearly secular discourses and practices of philosophy and that which appeared to be the domain of the distinctly spiritual and religious. (P.Hadot, 2002)

For Szakolczai this work opened up the possibility of viewing the thought of his chosen scholars- all dissidents from the dominant abstracted Cartesian and Kantian rationalism- as being capable of

³ [3] It should be noted that there appears to have been some change in Szakolczai's view of the importance of Dilthey's work since MWMF published some six years before the passage quoted above, for in this earlier discussion he notes Dilthey attempt to reconceptualise experience via the category of *Erlebnis* but goes on to enter the following series caveat, ◆'However, by trying to counter the Kantian universals by a similarly universal conceptualisation of "lived experience", Dilthey was trapped in a romantic "philosophy of life".' (MWMF,p.22) However to judge from the recent 2004 paper this claim of a competing universalism to Kant's seems to have in effect been withdrawn and instead Dilthey is praised for his ◆'fundamental insights' concerning the structures of experience and for understanding of the links between ◆'life and work' and for his pioneering application of these methods in Dilthey's biography of Schleiermacher. (Szakolczai, 2004, p.65))

exploration via carefully understood life experiences or meditative reflection. But the clues from this work only fully crystallize for Szakolczai when he has explored the work of Victor Turner.

Without doubt one of the most fascinating and innovative aspects of Szakolczai's exploration of social theory lies in the extensive use he makes of Turner's anthropological work.(referenced in MWMF, RHS and in GM and in papers,1998e, 2001b, 2001c, 2004 but this by no means exhausts the references).⁴ [4]

The central issue in respect of Turner concerns the concept of liminality and liminal situations. In Turner's anthropological thought the liminal was closely linked to the actual account of rights of passage that were linked to significant transformations of the status and self understanding of the people involved. The rite itself consisted of three phases: the rite of separation, the rite of transition and finally the rite of incorporation or reincorporation. For Turner and for Szakolczai the middle phase that is most important, for the period of transition is also the period of liminality, the period of uncertainty, malleability and transformation. This is the vital moment or period of transformation from one status to another from say childhood to adulthood. This is a difficult period almost by definition for the individual involved but it is also difficult for the society within which it is taking place for the normal social rules are in certain respects suspended during the transition. As Szakolczai puts it

❖In this way, rites of passage offer a conceptual framework combining the dislocation of social structure (socio-political level) and loss of identity (personal level). However the situation is potentially explosive; therefore the period of suspension was strictly limited in time and place and was guided by special ❖masters of ceremonies'. Once the ritual was performed, the state of suspension (an equivalent of a ❖state of emergency' in modern states) was over, the structural and normative characteristics of

4 [4] The issue of anthropology is very significant here when one looks at the key theoretical volumes that Szakolczai's has so far published MWMF, RHS AND GM and notes the centrality of in the first instance Victor Turner's work but then also the work of range of other scholars in anthropology, and the allied areas of mythology and comparative religion, for example Rene Girard, frequently referenced throughout much of Szakolczai's work and discussed at length in GM,(see especially p18-22 and p.153-156, and Szakolczai,2001,c). One could add the anthropologist George Dumezil, (see GM), the mythologist Karl Kerényi, (Szakolczai, 2004) and key background figures like Mircea Eliade, Arnold van Gennep, Gabriel Tarde and one sees that there would be plenty of scope for a companion volume by Szakolczai on what might be termed reflexive anthropological sociology.

order were restored, and everything returned to the same, except for some individuals changing their place within the order, and also their very mode of being.' (MWMF, p.23)

Szakolczai found confirmation of analysis in the late recognition by Turner (V. Turner, 1985) that Dilthey's work on the nature of experience and his own work on liminality, based on rites of passage were attempts to grasp the same thing. Connections that Turner believed were made clearer when the etymology of the word experience was looked at carefully, revealing its association with 'attempt, venture, risk' and later the Latin term for 'trial, proof, experiment, peril, danger, and testing' (MWMF, p.22 also see GM. p.67, and Szakolczai, 2004)

This focus on rites of passage seems to offer some solutions to theoretical and conceptual issues well outside the terrain of anthropology. It can Szakolczai suggests take us beyond the fixity of the subject of knowledge that we inherit from the Cartesian and Kantian traditions by giving real significance to the lived reality of the subject. The experiences of the theorist/researcher are seen as real events happening in the biography of the person and their society but not purely as 'singular irruptions, beyond reason, but having their own form and structure' (Ibid.) Experiences within the life of the subject can be understood in certain circumstances as decisive in shaping the subject in ways analogous to aspects of the spiritual exercises that in the ancient practice of philosophy as a way of life saw as necessary for genuine knowledge.

There are of course fairly obvious difficulties in applying the ideas of Turner's liminal rights of passage approach to modern society in general and modern social theorists in particular. One apparent difficulty, recognized by Szakolczai, is the limited nature of clearly observable rites of passage in modernity. But in following some hints in Turner's own work he is able to note the characteristic modern incompleteness concerning liminal experiences. Indeed right at the centre of much of Szakolczai recent work is a view of modernity as a permanent state of transition or 'permanent liminality', (see RHSP.215-226, Szakolczai, 1998e, 2001b, 2001c) However despite the absence of formal aspects of successful and recognized transition Szakolczai argues that in the personal biographies of thinkers there are genuinely liminal situations and that, 'proper conceptualisation of such situations would provide us with an approach to the conditions of possibility of understanding and the tools to understand the thinkers of the tradition of reflexive historical sociology..' (MWMF, p.25) He puts the issue very clearly and almost too baldly in his second major work,

◆ The central idea is that most breakpoints of an individual life are not that difficult to identify. In most cases they correspond to the major ◆ 'rites of passage' in one's life and are available in reasonably accurate and detailed curriculum vitae. In our contemporary world, due to the excessive formalization and emptying of all rites of passage, it is forgotten that such rituals do simply perform a formal-legalistic function but are the emotional and experiential breakpoints, liminal experiences. Dates of initiation, maturation, appointment, promotion and publication are not just trophies but provide the emotional and existential context of the work.' (RHS. p.6)

The analysis of the thinker's experiential liminality is explored via two distinct strategies: one is via their cultural formation beginning with childhood but in a manner that eschews the models of psychoanalysis and the other via the developed concept of the ◆ 'reading experiences'. Now reflexive historical sociological insight is a particular type of understanding and interpretation of the world even if there are wide differences in the kind of analysis produced by individual thinkers. What all such thinkers have in common is a wider comparative and interpretative capacity that goes beyond the formal disciplinary boundaries and beyond the focused detailed analysis of the particular that is the hall mark of modern the scholarly and scientific division of labour. Therefore you would expect to find that the kind of thinkers attracted to the reflexive historical sociology would in some measure be isolated or alienated from much of modern educational experience. A search for knowledge would take them outside the strongly institutionalised settings of school and university. Encounters with teaching figures marginalised within these educational settings would often be crucial for their future development. Nietzsche was a significant encounter for many of these scholars but discovered normally outside any formal curriculum.

Most significantly it is the concept of ◆ 'reading experiences' that Szokolczai sees as fundamental in its transformative effects on individual thinkers. We have mentioned Nietzsche already but he notes the significance of Marx, sometimes Freud quite frequently Kierkegaard, all possessing the explosive potential for this generations of thinkers.⁵ [5] All these thinkers have a highly personal quality to their work which is stamped as it were with their powerful temperaments and passions that go beyond the parameters of what we might call ◆ 'normal' scholarship. They all in their different ways contribute to

⁵ [5] It is now by no means clear that for newer generation that these thinkers would necessarily have the same powerful potential given the semi institutionalised status of many of these once potentially transgressive thinkers

the grasping of the interpretive meaning and significance of the present condition i.e. modernity which once it is grasped and accepted as true changes not only what we thought we knew but also inevitably ourselves in relation to what is known. Weber provides potent examples of this process (see the detail in MWMF) but whether this focus on modernity is an adequate understanding of Voegelin's achievement is much more open to question. Indeed as I suggest below Voegelin appears to refuse to fit this aspect of the model.⁶ [6]

When issues of techniques of analysis are finally put to one side the fundamental questions posed in an almost existential sense by these thinkers are perhaps best captured via what Szokolczai's reading of Weber highlights. Weber accepts the diagnosis of modernity in Nietzsche as the issue of 'nihilism' and in Kierkegaard of 'resignation'. But Weber sought to sharpen and deepen the analysis, in a sense fill out the sociological content of these ideas. This is done in part via concepts like 'disenchantment', and 'rationalisation' but the key term Szokolczai believes is 'religious rejections of the world'. Weber's vision can be summarised in the idea that there is a fundamental "affinity", but also a direct, "causal-genealogical" connection between the contemporary state of affairs and the religious rejections of the world.' (GM, P.47) The analysis points to an understanding that the globalised world of modernity is shot through with secularised versions of inner world asceticism and eschatology. But the upshot of this is a further paradox in that this understanding itself points to the affinity between Weber and that of other critiques of society (including Nietzsche and Marx) and that of the old prophets of Israel in the ancient world- Weber of course famously identified himself with Jeremiah. Weber's diagnosis points to contemporary problems being in part due to the long lasting effects of these earlier prophetic stances which give the prophetic stance a paradoxical character to say the least.

Eric Voegelin inherited the paradoxical consequences of Weber's analysis and made its study in many respects his own. Reflecting on the paradoxes and complexities of this inheritance took him in surprising directions that seem to pose some fundamental questions concerning the relationship of reflexive theorist and the field of his or her historical vision.

⁶ [6] However Szokolczai makes a plausible case for suggesting Voegelin does fit the model of liminal crises and the vital importance of reading experiences including those of Marx, Kierkegaard and emphatically Nietzsche and Weber, in the latter case mediated and powerfully encouraged by personal contact with Karl Jaspers, (see RHSP.p38 and more generally pp35-38) But he also notes that Freud is missing see GM p.63

Voegelin: Vision and History

Many readers of RHS and GM especially in Europe , not least in Britain and especially amongst social theorists - used to a diet of Weber Foucault Elias etc. will be surprised at the focus and space given to Eric Voegelin. For many this will be their first introduction to his work. Indeed one of the real virtues of these books is that they will force an engagement. If they persevere in the first instance with RHS they will learn a good deal about Voegelin for in fact the essay (41 pages long) in part one of that volume, they will find a work of major biographical and theoretical reconstruction based on extensive archival work in unpublished sources and in consultation with those who knew and worked with Voegelin. This is a significant contribution to scholarship in this area⁷ [7] . The experienced student of Voegelin's work will find a detailed application of the reflexive model of analysis outlined above applied to his 'life-works'. It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into the detailed interpretation of Voegelin's 'life-works' and the general outline of Voegelin's life is too well known to this audience to require summary. However we can concur with Szakolczai that Voegelin's work sought in part to establish the causes for the terrible violence and disorder of modern European history in the first instance within the recognisable framework of post Weberian social science and then secondly as a meditative and exploratory philosopher who explored the spiritual roots of human consciousness . In part the significance of Voegelin for Szakolczai is that he provides the political counterpart to Weber's emphasis on the affinities between the religious and economic transformations. As Weber sought the affinities between aspect of protestant culture and belief and the culture of early capitalism so Voegelin followed this inspiration in looking at the spiritually formative dynamics of the modern nation state and radical political movements. As Szakolczai put it 'if Weber's central conceptual innovation was the term "inner-worldly asceticism", then Voegelin countered it with the term "intramundane-eschatology".' (Szakolczai, 2001, p.353) It is he suggests in this really quite Weberian context that the famous claims of Voegelin about the Gnostic character of modernity should be understood. An understanding rooted in

⁷ [7] It is important to point out that Szakolczai has done considerable archival work on a number of the thinkers discussed a necessary feature of the life-work method he employs but clearly Szakolczai has been assisted in the case of his primary figures-Weber and Foucault- by the range of existing fairly detailed biographical studies and scholarly reconstructions eg. M Weber .. Mitzman etc and D. Macey, D.Eribon, J.Miller. For Voegelin however major biographical studies were largely absent, B. Cooper, 'the most substantial attempt to link life to work had not appeared when RHS was published and in fact a great deal of spade work was required

the continuing significance for the modern period of attempts to translate a transcendent realm of perfection into an immanent historical reality especially via means of a secret or privileged knowledge or gnosis.

Now despite the importance Voegelin has for Szakolczai ♦ the most significant thinker of his reflexive historical sociologists after Weber and Foucault. It is nonetheless clear that it is Voegelin's work that in certain respects troubles Szakolczai most. This is despite Voegelin providing key instances of analysis and important tools of conceptual understanding but in the end it seems that Voegelin does not quite provide what Szakolczai wants from him. The root of the problem is due to Voegelin's own development in which he moved from being a social scientific analyst of a type recognizable within a broadly conceived weberian tradition to a meditative philosopher for whom the issue of the analysis of modernity became less centrally significant because of both the way he understood newer empirical evidence and because of his own meditative engagement with the reality of the human condition. However it is not possible to make an absolute separation between the two aspects of his work

Szakolczai is of course well aware of the difficulty making such a separation although his attitude to it seems to shift somewhat between RHS and GM. In RHS Szakolczai devotes a chapter to what he terms the Gnostic revolt in an attempt to specify the thesis and to overview the lines of development in Voegelin's work. Here he notes the difficulty Voegelin presents,

♦Not satisfied with providing an original diagnosis of modernity or a study of the processes that led to the emergence of modern capitalism in comparative perspective, he also formulated a philosophy of his own. He not only went back to the original works of Plato and Aristotle, but put the existential tension with the divine that was still present in their works at the centre of all philosophical understanding. At this point the competence of a sociologist, even a reflexive historical sociologist, ends and Voegelin's work moves beyond the field.' (RHS, p.154)

He goes on to say that it might be argued that all of Voegelin mature work lies beyond the competence of sociologist i.e. *Order and History* and the late essays. However this will not quite do as he rightly points out Voegelin's thought is not so clear cut a key as the example of the important concept of metaxy or ♦the in between' originally developed by the later Voegelin out of Plato. This is a concept

crucially important for Szakolczai as it links with the concept of liminality. It seems likely that it was partly reading Voegelin that sensitised Szakolczai to the centrality of this concept. He could also have added that much of Voegelin's later work is still very interested in linking the developments of thought to particular historical contexts and experience especially the periods of empire as the volumes of *Order and History* testify.

However this recognition does not I fear fully dispose of the problem for if we turn to GM and the discussion of Voegelin there we find clear signs of frustration in the sociologist Szakolczai faced with the apparently wilfulness analysis from the reflexive historical sociologist cum philosopher Voegelin. The problem with Voegelin, Szakolczai suggests is that if his work seeks to analyse the roots of modern mass movements and revolutions and their relationship with the past, he 'should substantiate such claims by giving a detailed account of such links' (GM.p.60). The suggestion is that Voegelin never finally delivered this substantiation and that he presents a puzzling contrast with Weber and Foucault whose central difficulty was that they 'died before they could reach and draw the consequences of their historical work for the present.' (ibid) On the other hand Voegelin lived on for several decades (he died in 1985) after making the key break through around the work on the History of Political Ideas in the 1940s (see RHS, p.44-53) he never went on to provide the comprehensive account of modernity that Szakolczai wants, instead he turned to the ancient world and stayed with it in *Order and History*. As Szakolczai notes, 'the more Voegelin progressed in his meditations the more it helped him to analyse and understand the Greek classics, especially Plato but also the more impossible it became to analyse properly the modern period..' (GM.p.63)

The problem is posed even more acutely when Szakolczai examines the last substantial work that Voegelin published in his life time Volume 4 or *Order and History, The Ecumenic Age* (E.Voegelin, 1974) It is here that Szakolczai seems to not fully appreciate what is on offer as a solution to his perplexities..

There is no question that *The Ecumenic Age* is a most difficult work and although it constitutes volume four of *Order and History* it was published some seventeen years after the earlier three volumes which had all appeared in fairly quick succession in 1956 and 1957. It contains much of Voegelin mature theoretical reflections but for many scholars frustrating little firstly about Christianity and its socio-cultural effectiveness in contrast to Platonism and secondly about the relationship between these different philosophical and religious experientially based symbolisations and the forms of modernity. Szakolczai notes with frustration the treatment of St Augustine who 'if there was a Christian thinker

whose experience was fundamental for later development' it was he but Augustine ♦ is only discussed as the source of a deviation leading to Hegel and Toynbee'. (GM.p.66) He goes on to note wryly that if Augustine can be so treated as ♦ irrelevant' it is not surprising that figures like Dilthey, Nietzsche, are also but adds, ♦ this does not make it more acceptable'(ibid.).

Why should a thinker of Voegelin ability appear to behave in such a cavalier way with vital figures and the pattern of what Szakalczai calls ♦ effective history'. I cannot fully answer this problem here but surely part of the answer is that Voegelin did genuinely believe that in some respects such treatment was irrelevant. It seems very startling as the historian Geoffrey Barraclough once noted in a generally sympathetic response to *The Ecumenic Age* ♦ it is hard for anyone whose interest is concentrated on the contemporary world, to be concerned with a writer who proclaims "nothing much has happened during the last 2500 years" ' (G. Barraclough, 1981, p.174, quote from Voegelin is from *The Ecumenic Age, Order and History Vol.IVp.331*)⁸ [8]

The reasons for this lie in the first chapter of *The Ecumenic Age*, ♦ Historiogenesis' which is rather surprisingly described by Szakolczai as being an exercise that ♦ sketches the historical background'. Rather this text which Voegelin considered important enough to publish ,in slightly different forms, three times, ⁹ [9] claims to provide a whole theory of history or perhaps more precisely a way of dissolving other theories of history. Voegelin says, ♦ Historiogenesis is a speculation on the origin and cause of social order' it presents a line of a societies development and constitute for Voegelin a ♦ millennial constant'(1974,p.67) that run from the Summerian King List to at least Hegel's Philosophy of History, as he puts it ♦ historiogenesis as an autonomous symbolism has by now a lifetime of four thousand years' (ibid.) This is a controversial position because it suggest the persistence within a quasi scientific form of potent ancient conceptions.

⁸ [8] Barraclough was writing about Voegelin's potential contribution for understanding imperialism which he went on to praise for at least counter-acting dominant positivist accounts by foregrounding the tension between the spiritual and material aspects of the world ie re-sensitizing the reader to the fundamental weberian sensibility

⁹ [9] , Once in 1960 in *Philosophisches Jahrbuch. LXVII*, in an expanded form in *Anamnesis* in Germany in 1966, {see now the English translation of this volume in Eric Voegelin, 2002, and then finally in the *Ecumenic Age*, in 1974

However if it is taken seriously it follows that the modernity that preoccupies human sciences like sociology is not the novel bloc of experience that Szakolczai, like most of us tend to regard it as, but fundamentally just a part of a much longer period. To question or explore the symbolism of historiogenesis is to question the linear emphasis in accounting for human social consciousness. Voegelin in the enhanced philosophical meditative stage of his career came to see as writers very close to him at this late stage of his life render it, that 'The tension between existent things and the ground of existence will always be experienced and constitute the common centre of all symbolisms, whether they are mythical, revelatory, philosophical, or expressions of the modern revolt against transcendence'. (T. Hollweck and P. Caringella, 1990, p. xxvi) This conception is undoubtedly the fruit of long and deep reflection on the conditions of understanding human experience in history and it is at least open to question whether it remains within the terrain of conventional historical sociology. But if reflexivity at its highest level is about the exploration of the conditions of our understanding then what might be thought of as disciplinary liminal anxiety is quite misplaced.

Bibliography

Cooper, B (1999) *Eric Voegelin and the Foundations of Modern Political Science*, Columbia , University of Missouri Press

Elias, N. (1978) *What is Sociology?*, London , Hutchison

Hadot, P. (1995) *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, Oxford , Blackwell

Hadot, P. (2002) *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* Belknap Press

Hollweck, T & P. Caringella, P. (1990) Editors introduction to Voegelin, E *What Is History? And Other Late Unpublished Writings*, Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Vol. 28

Ingliss, D. & Robertson, R. (2004) 'Beyond the Gates of the Polis: Reconfiguring Sociology's Ancient Inheritance' *Journal of Classical Sociology*, Vol. 4, No. 2

Ingliss, D. & Robertson, R.(2005) ♦'The Ecumenical Analytic ♦'Globalization', Reflexivity and the Revolution in Greek Historiography'

European Journal of Social Theory, Vol.8, No.2

McMylor,P. (2005) ♦'Reflexive Historical Sociology: Consciousness, Experience and the Author', *History of the Human Sciences*, Vo.18. No.4

Patocka,J (1999) *Body, Community, Language, World* , Open Court Publishing

Patocka, J (2002) *Plato and Europe* , Stanford, Stanford University Press

Petropolis, W,(1998) *Eric Voegelin and German Sociology*, Manchester Manchester Sociology Occasional Papers

Price,G.L.(1994) ♦'Eric Voegelin: a Classified Bibliography', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* , Vol.76, No.2, Summer

Szakolczai, A.(1992) *On the Exercise of Power in Modern Societies, East and West*, EUI Working Papers SPS No. 92/22 Florence, European University Institute.

Szakolczai, A.(1993) *Nietzsche's Genealogical Method: Presentation and Application*, EUI Working Papers SPS No. 93/7 Florence, European University Institute

Szakolczai, A. (1994a) *Thinking Beyond the East-West Divide: Patocka, Foucault, Hamvas, Elias, and the Care of the Self*. EUI Working Paper SPS No. 94/2 Florence, European University Institute.

Szakolczai, A (1994b) ♦'Thinking Beyond the East-West Divide: Foucault, Patocka, and the Care of the Self', *Social Research*, Vol. 61, No.2, p.297-323

Szakolczai, A. (1996) *Durkheim, Weber and Parsons and the Founding Experiences of Sociology*, EUI Working Paper SPS No. 96/11 Florence, European University Institute.

Szakolczai, A.(1997) *Norbert Elias and Franz Borkenau: Intertwined Life-Works*, EUI Working Paper SPS No. 97/8 Florence, European University Institute.

Szakolczai, A.(1998a) *Identity Formation Mechanisms: A Conceptual and Genealogical Analysis*. EUI Working Paper SPS No. 98/2 Florence, European University Institute

Szakolczai, A.(1998b) *Max Weber and Michel Foucault: Parallel Life-Works*, London , Routledge

Szakolczai, A(1998c) ♦'Reflexive Historical Sociology' *European Journal of Social Theory*, 1 (2): 209-227

Szakolczai, A (1998d) ♦'Reappraising Foucault' *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol.103, 5. 14021-1410

Szakolczai, A (1998e) ♦'The Global Monastery' *World Futures: the Journal of General Evolution*, Vol. 53, No.1 p.1-17

Szakolczai, A and Fustos, L.(1999) *Assessing the Legacy of Communism: Continuities and Discontinuities in the East-Central European Transitions III*.EUI Working Paper SPS No. 99/4 Florence, European University Institute.

Szakolczai, A (2000) *Reflexive Historical Sociology*, London , Routledge

Szakolczai, A (2001a), ♦'Eric Voegelin's History of Political Ideas' *European Journal of Social Theory*, 4 (3): 351-368

Szakolczai, A (2001b) ♦'In a Permanent State of Transition: Theorising the East European Condition', *Limen*, Vol.1, (www.mi2.hr/limen)

Szakolczai, A (2001c) ♦'Civilization and Its Sources', *International Sociology*, Vol.16, No.3, p.371-388

Szakolczai, A (2003) *The Genesis of Modernity*, London , Routledge

Szakolczai, A (2004) ♦'Experiential Sociology' *Theoria* April,

Voegelin, E.(1974) *The Ecumenic Age*, Vol. 4 of *Order and History*, Baton Rouge and London , Louisiana State University Press.

Voegelin,E. (1990) ♦'Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme', in *Published Essays 1966-1985, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol.12. Ed. E.Sandoz, Baton Rouge and London , Louisiana State University Press.

E.Voegelin, (1997-1999) *The History of Political Ideas*, 8 Volumes, General Editors, T.Holleck and E.Sandoz, as Volumes 19-26 of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Columbia, University of Missouri Press.

Voegelin, E. (1999) ♦The Political Religions' in *Modernity Without Restraint The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Volume 5 Ed,M. Henningsen, Columbia, University of Missouri Press

Voegelin, E. (2002) *Anamnesis on the Theory of History and Politics*, Vol.6 of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Ed. D.Walsh, Columbia, University of Missouri Press

Turner,V (1985) 'Experience and Performance: Towards a New Processual Anthropology', pp. 205-26 in *On the Edge of the Bush*. Tucson , Arizona : The University of Arizona Press.

* In part of the discussion I have drawn on in a revised form elements from McMylor 2005