

Social Science and Salvation

Notes on one branch of German Sociology

Copyright 2000 William Petropulos

1. Introduction

Eric Voegelin trained as a sociologist. His dissertation, written at the age of twenty-one, was concerned with establishing the nature of the science of sociology.¹ His first book, *The Form of the American Mind*,² was at the center of the process of his habilitation in sociology. But Eric Voegelin is not generally thought of as a sociologist. In his later works, especially *Order and History*³, one finds the focus of his thought on God and on humankind as Imago Dei; by no means typical themes for Sociologists.⁴ In this article I wish to explore the connection between the German sociological tradition in which Eric Voegelin was trained and his later work with its focus on the experiences of divinity. This tradition may be briefly characterized by the fact that it understands the symbol "Geist", which is sometimes translated into English as "

¹Eric Voegelin, *Wechselwirkung und Gezweiung*. Manuscript and Typescript, Eric Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, box 51, file 5.

² Eric Voegelin, *Ober die Form des Amerikanischen Geistes*, Tübingen, 1928. Translation: *On the Form of the American Mind*, ed. by Barry Cooper and Jürgen Gebhardt. *Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Paul Caringella et. al., vol. 1. Baton Rouge 1995

³Eric Voegelin, *Order And History*, 5 vols., Baton Rouge, 1956-1985.

⁴For example, distinguishing the advance in understanding concerning the order of the soul, society and the cosmos which was achieved by the Apostle Paul, from the experience of Greek philosophy, Voegelin writes: "The classic analysis reached the divine aition as the source of order in reality; it differentiated the structure of existence in the Metaxy, but it did not extend to the structure of divine reality in its pneumatic depth of creation and salvation". Eric Voegelin, *Order And History*, vol. 4, (1974) p. 304.

mind" and at other times as "spirit", with the full range of meanings present in the term, not the least of which is the religious meaning. Of course no one will maintain that everyone working in the humanities in German speaking countries, the so-called *Geisteswissenschaften*", is concerned with the full amplitude of the symbol's meaning. However the tradition in which Eric Voegelin was trained would not take it at a lower rate.

I will concentrate on Othmar Spann's and Max Scheler's contribution to Eric Voegelin's understanding of "Geist". But I would like to briefly mention some of the names of the earlier generations which worked in this branch of social thought. These include German thinkers who tried to develop Immanuel Kant's philosophy in the direction of a deeper understanding of religion; especially, Fichte, Schelling and Baader. It was Schelling who brought Protestant Philosophical Idealism into contact with Catholic thought at the university of Munich and, in conversations extending over many years with Franz von Baader was, in his turn, influenced by Catholic thought.⁵

Under the editorship of Othmar Spann the social thought of the Romantics, of Fichte, Schelling and Baader, was published during the 1920's.⁶ In Voegelin's dissertation we find reference to no less than five works of Johann Gottlieb Fichte. The importance of Schelling's work for Voegelin has been emphasized by Voegelin himself, especially in his *History of Political Ideas*.⁷

Among the next generation in this tradition we find the "Speculative Theists". In *Race and State* (1933), discussing those who have influenced his thought in the area of Philosophical Anthropology, Voegelin underlines the importance of Immanuel Hermann Fichte (the son of Johann Gottlieb Fichte), whose work on the mind-body-soul problem he found superior to the work of those who came much later.⁸

But here I will confine myself to the influences on Eric Voegelin's understanding of Geist" imparted to him by the generation of his university teachers.

2. Eric Voegelin and the "German Society for Sociology"

A "German Society for Sociology" (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie) was

⁵ Thomas F. O'Meara, *The Romantic Idealism and Roman Catholicism. Schelling, and the Theologians*, London 1982.

⁶ Die Herdflamme: Sammlung der gesellschaftswissenschaftlichen Grundwerke aller Zeiten und Völker, hrsg. von Othmar Spann, Jena. Vol. 8: Gesellschaft und Staat im Spiegel deutscher Romantik, ed. by Jakob Baxa, 1924. Vol. 12: Schellings Schriften zur Gesellschaftsphilosophie, Ausgewählt und mit Einfführung v. Manfred Schröter, 1926. Vol. 14: Franz von Baaders Schriften zur Gesellschaftsphilosophie, hrsg. v. Johannes Sauter, 1925.

⁷ Eric Voegelin, "Schelling", *The New Order And Last Orientation. The History of Political Ideas*, vol. VII, pp. 193-243. *The Collected Works Of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 25, Columbia 1999. Now in English as: Eric Voegelin, *Race and State*, ed. by Klaus Vondung, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 2, Baton Rouge 1997, p. 30.

organized in 1909 by, among others, Max Weber, Georg Simmel and Werner Sombart.⁹ Both of Eric Voegelin's teachers, Othmar Spann and Hans Kelsen, later became members. After its reorganisation in 1921 its statutes limited membership to 125 scholars; candidates were nominated and voted upon by current members. There was also an Austrian Sociological Society, founded in 1907, many of whose members also belonged to the German society.¹⁰ Indeed, judging from the introductory remarks of the dignitaries welcoming the German Sociological Society's bi-annual meeting to Vienna in 1926, it would appear that neither the separate existence of the two societies nor of the two countries was regarded as a condition with much of a future.¹¹ If there is one theme running through the works of German sociologists in the period between World War I and the National Socialist accession to power in Germany in 1933, it is the continual, sometimes acrimonious debate concerning the nature of sociology itself.¹² Indeed there were influential figures, like the historian Georg von Below, who edited a series of social science works with Othmar Spann, who denied that there was a need for a separate science of sociology at all: the individual disciplines of history, economics, law etc. were quite adequate

to the tasks of social research.¹³

This was also a period in which sociology struggled for recognition in Germany. And the case has been made that it was not until after World War II, with the influence of American sociology, that the subject found full academic acceptance.¹⁴ Eric Voegelin first appears in the minutes of the society's bi-annual meetings in 1922

in a discussion on the nature and scope of the sociology of art.¹⁵ The society's last meeting before the Second World War was in 1930. For reasons which are not quite clear, but which undoubtedly had to do with the political situation, the 1932 meeting was twice postponed, finally being re-scheduled for 1934. In this year, under attack as a host of liberalism by the new regime, the leaders of the German Sociological

⁹Joachim Matthes, "Soziologie", *Staatslexikon*, hrsg. v. der Görresgesellschaft, 7. Aufl., Freiburg 1995, vol. 5, pp. 91-98.

¹⁰Reinhold Knoll et. al., "Der österreichische Beitrag zur Soziologie von der Jahrhundertwende bis 1938", *Soziologie in Deutschland und Österreich 1918-1945, K61ner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, Sonderheft 23/198 1*, ed. by M. Rainer Lepsius, Opladen, 1981, p. 59-102, here: 61.

¹¹Dirk Kilsler, "Der Streit um die Bestimmung der Soziologie auf den Deutschen Soziologietagen 1910 bis 1930", *ibid.*, pp. 199-245, here: 221.

¹²Othmar Spann, *Gesellschaftslehre*, 2. ed., Leipzig, 1923, p. 9ff. Compare the interview with Leopold von Wiese in: Dirk Kilsler, *Soziologische Abenteuer.- Earle Edward Eubank besucht europäische Soziologen im Sommer 1934*, Opladen 1985, here p. 164.

¹³Georg von Below, "Die Entstehung der Soziologie", hrsg. aus dem Nachlasse von Othmar Spann, *Deutsche Beiträge zur Wirtschafts- und Gesellschaftslehre, VII*, Jena, 1928, here pp. 20-22.

¹⁴Joachim Matthes, "Soziologie", p. 92.

¹⁵*Verhandlungen des Dritten Deutschen Soziologentages am 24. und 25. September 1922 in Jena*, Tübingen, 1923, p. 181-182.

Society nominated a few new members who were known to be National Socialists or party sympathizers and chose one of their current members, who was acceptable to the new government, Hans Freyer, as its co-chairman. However none of the attempts at accommodation saved the society from ruin. Freyer included members of similar organizations which were more friendly to National Socialism. This influx of new members, along with the forced emigration of many former ones and the "inner emigration" of still others, delivered the society completely into the hands of the dictatorship¹⁶. As originally conceived, the society only returned to life following World War II.

Upon Eric Voegelin's return to Europe in the late 1950's to take up a position at the University of Munich, Helmut Plegner contacted him to inform him that he had been elected to the German Sociological Society and to ask if he would accept his election.¹⁷ Voegelin responded by saying that he considered it an honor and that he accepted with gratitude.¹⁸ Even after his return to the United States in 1969 Eric Voegelin remained a member. In 1975 the president, Rainer Lepsius, wrote to Voegelin, acknowledging that one could no longer expect Eric Voegelin's active participation at the society's meetings and offering him the status of corresponding member.

Lepsius added that it was very important, both to the society and to him personally, that Voegelin remain a member.¹⁹

3. Leopold von Wiese: "Current Sociology: Germany" (1927)

What were the various views on sociology in the post World War One atmosphere in which Eric Voegelin became a member of the German Sociological Society? In 1926, the editor of the "Kolner Vierteljahrshefte für Soziologie", Leopold von Wiese wrote that German Sociology was only slowly beginning to find acceptance as an academic discipline.²⁰ If, so von Wiese, one understands sociology as a general social science and reckons various connate social sciences as parts of it, one can find a scientific tradition and a comprehensive literature in Germany which he would call "sociology". If on the other hand, "one goes further and enlarges the meaning into that of Social Philosophy, one may quote, since Kant, a large number of prominent works of the romantic and idealistic schools, often under other names than Sociology".²¹ Von Wiese continues: "Comte, who may be considered as the founder of the Western European sociology has influenced Germany, partly through Herbert

¹⁶ Dirk Kötter, *Die frühe deutsche Soziologie 1909 bis 1934 und ihre Entstehungs-Milieus*, Opladen, 1984, pp. 513-527.

¹⁷ Helmut Pleßner to Eric Voegelin. 11.06.1959, Eric Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, box 10, file 6.

¹⁸ Eric Voegelin to Helmut Pleßner, 29.06.1959, *ibid.*

¹⁹ Rainer Lepsius to Eric Voegelin, 14.02.1975, *ibid.*

²⁰ Leopold von Wiese, "Current Sociology: Germany", *The Sociological Review*, XIX (1. Jan. 1927). The article is excerpted from his *Soziologie: Geschichte und Hauptprobleme*, Berlin - Leipzig, 1926.

²¹ Leopold von Wiese, "Current Sociology", p. 21.

Spencer by his Positivism and his notion of Organism". But, "on the whole one can hardly talk of a Comte-Spencer school in Germany, whilst Positivism, outside the circles of Marxism, only found disciples for a short time".²² Von Wiese points out, that "Twenty-five years ago the connection of sociology with the Natural Sciences was commonly assumed. But to-day there is a strongly dominant tendency which claims that sociology is a mental science, and that the naturalist interpretation of society is imperfect, and thus there is an endeavor to get beyond Positivism."²³ The contemporary state of German sociology, so von Wiese, may be traced to three influences: (1) The German Romantics and the idealistic Philosophy; (2) Comte and Spencer; (3) the development apart from Philosophy due to other sciences, such as History, Political Economy and Law. Mentioning Dilthey's: "understanding science" and Scheler's "phenomenological method", von Wiese adds that these two writers believe that "social facts" and their real dynamics" can only be "sought in a study of their deeper spiritual motives". But, von Wiese cautions, this "broadening and deepening of the methods of social science, justified as it may be, has nevertheless greatly increased the danger of subjectivity. Max Weber indeed taught us- and quite rightly- that we had to be content with the subjective and conscious motives of the people under consideration. But others (...) deem it their duty to get at the objective, absolute, meaning of events". The editor of the "Kolner Vierteljahrshefte für Soziologie" has little

patience with Othmar Spann, who von Wiese claims, "proposes a sort of Social Metaphysics", and who is opposed to any kind of empiricism in sociology. The "Idea of the Whole, of Society as an Entity, of which all social groups are only parts and members, is predominant with him. Let us look at Othmar Spann's sociology, since it is of primary importance for understanding Eric Voegelin's concept of the nature of sociology.

4. The Sociology of Othmar Spann

According to Othmar Spann society is the objectification of the inner life of human beings, a reflection of their ethical and moral nature. Not just action and intention, but also insight, thought and intuition are morally positive or negative. Therefore, so Spann, in order to understand the outward forms of life as it is expressed in institutions, one must proceed from a knowledge of the moral being and move to the periphery, to the empirical facts of the external world as embodiments, however remote, of the moral center. If empirical research is to be more than a random collection of data it must be informed by moral insight. The sociologist, in order to do his work properly, must be a "personality", a term Othmar Spann takes from Immanuel Kant, denoting a being endowed with reason and therefore morally free.²⁴ If, so Spann, a person does not know in his own being what, for instance, "justice" is, he or she will certainly not understand the social institutions which were created for

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 22

²⁴ Othmar Spann, *Gesellschaftslehre*, p. 5.

its administration.²⁵ Sociological investigation is not interested in mechanical laws of cause and effect, a model for investigating the inorganic world developed in early modern physics, but rather explores "meaningful connections" ("sinnvolle Zusammenhänge").²⁶ Behind every sociological investigation, reflected or unreflected, there looms, according to Spann, a metaphysical notion of the human being. What is called modern sociology, which Spann traces back to Hobbes and the French Encyclopaedists, fails to be social science at all because of the false materialistic metaphysics which informs it. True social science, which Spann finds in Plato and Aristotle as well as in St. Thomas, revives in the modern period with German Idealism and the Romantics who oppose mechanical conceptions of the human being with the deeper understanding that the human lives in community with God and only through God in community with one another. Sociology, so Spann, must follow "value and being" ("Wert und Sein") to their root in the moral person. Such a science precludes a method based by analogy on a model of the sciences of natural phenomena.²⁷ Spann rejects von Wiese's notion, indebted to the theories of Georg Simmel, that sociology is the science of "social forms".²⁸ Instead, he argues, sociology investigates a concrete totality, society, whose nature is spiritual. The relation of the parts to the whole and to one another is that of spiritual spheres of greater and lesser dignity. These relationships do not have to be deduced from an apriori notion of social reality, nor explicated in metaphysics. By analysing the human being in society one can identify the different spheres, the spiritual, the vital etc., and differentiate the realm of ends from the realm of means. Plato and Aristotle have given examples, so Spann, of such a science.²⁹

The whole is prior to its parts, and the investigation must begin with the spiritual reality of society. But the decision to begin one's study with the whole does not mean that one can overlook the "inalienable value of the individual's moral freedom" an error which, so Spann, Hegel committed. Spann's sociology tries to avoid the two extremes of a collectivism which overlooks the individual and an individualism which erroneously assumes that fully developed individuals enter into contract with one another to create society out of the sum of their already defined private interests. Rather, according to Othmar Spann, the human only reaches his specifically human individuality, namely his moral autonomy, by being awakened to it in the spiritual process Spann calls "Gezweigung". This term may be translated as "community" or as "pairing" and denotes a spiritual connection between two or more human persons. In the "Gezweigung" "family", for example, there are not two individual exemplars of the species *homo naturalis*, who just happen to enter into the relationship of parent and

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25ff.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

³⁰ Othmar Spann, *Gesellschaftsphilosophie mit einem Anhang über die philosophischen Voraussetzungen der Wirtschaftswissenschaften*. Handbuch der Philosophie, München - Berlin, 1928, p. 49.

child. Rather both parent and child participate in the spiritual reality of the family as they grow into that particular community. Under "Gezweigungen" Spann understands pretty much what are generally called institutions, for there is no human community without a spiritual bond. This spirit should not be thought of as static or as a substance. The unfolding of Geist takes place in its members, the individuals endowed with freedom and moral responsibility who are awakened to their spiritual talents and grow into them in the various forms of Gezweigung. Among the forms which Spann denotes as "equally primordial" ("gleichursprünglich"), are religion and philosophy, science and art. Since the individual in his thinking and actions is a morally free agent he can of course reach a deeper understanding of the nature of the particular sphere into which he has entered than the other participants have attained. In this way the objective spirit, in its individual spheres ("Teilganzen"),³¹ develops and differentiates in time, and societies and parts of societies experience change and transformation. Correlative to the spheres of the objective spirit is the realm of morals. Without going into detail it must be said that for Othmar Spann religion and philosophy constitute the most important sphere. The highest form of Gezweigung, the unio mystica with God, is treated separately by Spann.³² The depth of vision which one finds in faith, or in the mystical Gezweigung with God, complimented by the ability to shape and differentiate the vision in thought, become the center of the individual informing his thought and action in all other spheres.³³

4.1 Comparison: Leopold von Wiese and Othmar Spann

On what do Leopold von Wiese and Othmar Spann agree?

1. Both assert that sociology based on an analogy with natural science or on any form of "naturalism" were current in Germany around 1900, but have been dead for a quarter of a century.

2. They agree that the influence of August Conte has been minor. Spann, and those close to him, view the Frenchman's influence as not only slight but, in so far as it existed at all, "pernicious".³⁴

3. Whereas Spann looks to Plato and Aristotle as the founders of social science, von Wiese shares the view of the American sociologist Albion Small that, Plato is a "prime example of what sociology is not". According to Small the problem is that Plato does not apply the method of observing the "objective world", in search of phenomena which can be brought under the laws of "cause and effect".³⁵

4. Spann and von Wiese point out that there is little agreement in Germany on the nature of the science of sociology. And of course it is on the nature of sociology that von Wiese and Spann disagree. Von Wiese rejects Othmar Spann's theory, with its

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 75ff.

³² O.Spann, *Gesellschaftslehre*, pp. 184-210.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

³⁴ Georg von Below, *Entstehung der Soziologie*, p. 8.

³⁵ Quoted in Leopold von Wiese, *Soziologie: Geschichte und Hauptprobleme*, p. 16.

central term "Gezweiung" as a "sort of social metaphysics". In his turn Othmar Spann rejects von Wiese's sociology of "Relationships" ("Beziehungslehre") as a "formalistic" sociology following in the school of Georg Simmel, and equally incapable of coming to grips with society. Von Wiese also understands his sociology to be following in the footsteps of Georg Simmel, but of course rejects the charge of empty formalism. Let us turn to Eric Voegelin's dissertation, *Wechselwirkung und Gezweiung*, for an example of a work done in the school of Othmar Spann in which the attempt is made to determine the nature of the science of sociology.

5. Eric Voegelin's dissertation 1922

Eric Voegelin has given a short description of his dissertation "Wechselwirkung und Gezweiung"³⁶ (or "interaction" and "pairing") in his *Autobiographical Reflections*. "it concerned", he says, "the ontological difference between constructing social reality out of relations between autonomous individuals or of assuming a pre-existent spiritual bond between human beings that would be realized in their personal relations".³⁷ The term "Wechselwirkung", or "interaction", was taken from Georg Simmel's sociology and refers to the psychic actions and responses of individuals. Othmar Spann's term, as we have seen, denotes the fact that noetic acts take place in spiritual community.

The 150+ page dissertation, written at the University of Vienna in 1921 under the direction of Othmar Spann and Hans Kelsen, is divided into two equal parts. In the first Voegelin explicates the meaning of "Gezweiung", contrasting it with the theory of Interaction". The second examines the thought of Georg Simmel, the sociologists associated with "Die Kölner Vierteljahrshefte für Sozialwissenschaft", Theodor Litt and others. Voegelin asks: What is the object and method of sociology? What type of a science is it? Simmel's theory of "interaction" is inadequate because,

despite its attempt to explicate spiritual being, it remains in the sphere of psychic being. Nevertheless, so Voegelin, there are aspects of the theory which can be brought into harmony with the social theory of Othmar Spann, especially with the themes associated with the term 'Gezweiung'.³⁸ It is Voegelin's intention to build on these results in order to develop a theory of sociology. The "task of sociology is to grasp a phenomenon in its quality of being a "social phenomenon". For example, so Voegelin, sociology must be able to determine why a particular painting is a Dutch painting, or a particular

31 Eric Voegelin, *Wechselwirkung und Gezweiung* (1922), Holograph and Typescript, Eric Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, box 51, file 5.

37 Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, ed. by Ellis Sandoz, Baton Rouge 1989, p. 35.

38 Eric Voegelin, *Wechselwirkung und Gezweiung*, p. V.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. V-VI. Successful examples of such a sociology Voegelin finds in Pierre Duhem, *Ziel und Struktur der physikalischen Theorien*, Leipzig 1908; Josef Nadler *Die Berliner Romantik 1800-1814*, Berlin 1921; Heinrich Wölfflin,

philosophical system a French philosophical system, etc.³⁹ The sociological method assumes the knowledge of essences- one must know what a painting "is" before one can ask the question concerning its social being- but sociology itself is not concerned with the essence of an entity, for example the question, what is art?⁴⁰ Although sociologists, according to Voegelin, disagree on almost everything, they do agree that social phenomena appear only where humans are joined with one another ("Menschen in Verbindung").⁴¹ Therefore the human's relationship to the "creative spirit" which brings forth cultural objects is a relationship to the "socialized spirit" (*vergesellschafteter Geist*).⁴² The basic problem confronting the sociologist is found in the fact that while, on the one hand, society exists independent of individuals, existing prior to them and maintaining its identity after the individuals have passed away, on the other hand, society is dependent upon individuals and can only exist in and through them. The solution to this antimony, so Voegelin, is to be found in the fact that the human individual is a composite being. As far as the physical and psychic levels of the human being are concerned the individual is a closed being. For neither is the physical individual part of a larger whole, nor are the individual's psychic functions part of a larger entity's psychic being. Upon this substratum of physical and psychic being society rises. However, spiritually the human is not a closed being. What the individual is spiritually he is only in community with others ("Gezweiung"). Therefore it is fair to say that society is a super-individual relationship.⁴³ But it is a relationship between spirits, not between bodies and psyches. Before Voegelin proceeds to present arguments for his view, he examines previous attempts to grasp social reality by those who, according to him, pay insufficient attention to the ontological difference between the human's psycho-physical nature and the human's spiritual being. Among such failed attempts Voegelin points to the assertion that the unity of society may be found in the interaction of its individuals, the "formal theories" criticized by Othmar Spann with reference to Georg Simmel and Leopold von Wiese. Here we can pass over von Wiese. For, after an examination of one of von Wiese's principle theoretical explications, Voegelin concludes that von Wiese's "thoughts follow completely in Simmel's tracks ... and fail to show, in any single point, the least progress beyond" him.⁴⁴ According to Voegelin, the theory of interaction denotes the double chain of causality in which the psychic

acts of individuals mutually impact upon one another. The theory assumes that society is the sum of individual interactions and that societies differ from one another only by virtue of the intensity and number of such interactions. Members of one society have more frequent and more intense interactions with each other than they do with individuals of another. Thus society is quantitatively determined. But the theory fails to explain how quantitative interactions

Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe, 2. ed. Munich 1917.

⁴⁰Eric Voegelin, *Wechselwirkung und Gezweigung*, p. 2.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., p. 3.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 10f.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 110.

transform into the qualities by which a society knows itself as a society, and by which it is distinguished from others. Thus, so Voegelin, the theory fails to address the nature of social reality. With the example of the process of social assimilation, Voegelin illustrates the theory's inadequacy. A person leaving one society and entering a new one ceases to have interactions with individuals in the former society and enters into relations with individuals in the new society. Nevertheless not all individuals with this experience assimilate to the new society. And the reverse is also true, a person who has left one society and assimilated to a new one can return to the former society and, despite renewed interactions with the individuals of that society, find himself a stranger. Voegelin readily concedes that physical and psychic interaction are necessary to the process of assimilation, but, it is clear from these examples, so Voegelin, that the causal-mechanical and psychic processes between individuals presented in the theory of "Interaction" cannot explain social acts.⁴⁵ He suggests instead that interactions between individuals are bearers of a "substance"- using that term merely as a marker for an as yet undefined quality- which constitutes the social relationship *Soziale Beziehung*. To explore the nature of this "substance", Voegelin reformulates the paradox mentioned earlier on the relationship of individuals to society, now in terms of the social substance:

1) The social-substance relationship exists prior to and encompasses the psycho-physical individuals.

2) The social-substance relationship is rooted ("fundiert") in psycho-physical interactions ("Wechselwirkungszusammenhang").

The two types of relationship occur in different parts of the bodily-spiritual unity *leiblich-geistige Einheit*"), which we call "human".⁴⁶

The psycho-physical ego is the subject we speak of when we view the human being under the aspect of his belonging to the realm explored by the natural sciences. But for the social sphere we require, according to Voegelin, a new term, that of the "social-ego" to denote the realm which rises above the sphere of physical and psychic nature.⁴⁷

Voegelin credits Othmar Spann with having adequately explained the nature of the social-ego. It cannot be seen in the relationship of "part to whole", with "society" being the "whole". Rather the totality "society" is a quality of which the social-egos are qualitative elements. All spheres of the spirit- family, state, etc. evince the same structure. The participants in these spheres are the corresponding types of ego. The totality of these spheres is society. And in correlation to society we find the social-ego, the synthesis of the various types of egos corresponding to the respective spiritual spheres which make up social reality. As a spiritual being ("geistiges Wesen"), the human is a social-ego, a spiritual quality open to and participating in an encompassing spiritual reality. The social-ego is rooted in the psychic-physical being, but it is not identical with the psychic-physical

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14f.

ego. Further, the foundational parts- body and soul- only attain meaning and purpose to the extent that they help the spiritual part fulfill its purpose. Here Voegelin quotes Immanuel Kant on the dignity of the human being. By means of his reason the human can raise himself to freedom and independence; he is a "personality" that is, a being who is above the mechanical laws of nature and watches over it, including those parts of himself which fall under the laws of nature. In the form of imperatives, the free personality confronts this part of the self with the laws discovered by reason.⁴⁸ In pointing out the dual nature of the human being sociology has gone as far as it can go. It does not have the conceptual means to explain it in detail, that is a task for metaphysics. But sociology must recognize the fact of this duality to avoid the pitfalls of confusing the spiritual sphere with that of the psycho-physical levels of being.

The spiritual totality exists prior to the individuals who grasp its meaning. But in the various depths and completeness of their understanding individuals also define themselves and differentiate themselves from one another and the whole.⁴⁹ Against Hegel and Marx, Voegelin writes: "The social processes do not take place in some transcendent mythical consciousness which reduces the individual to a meaningless emanation of the encompassing social totality: "It is the individual, who must think".⁵⁰ The situation of social communication is thus placed in the realm of man's moral being. The spiritual impulse ("geistige Anregung") is itself experienced as a value and therefore sought by the individual in order to intensify and deepen his understanding. At the same time the individual effort contributes to the spiritual growth of society. Therefore: "it is an imperative, or postulate to maximize and deepen the experiences made in community" ("Gezweigung"). "In the last instance" all

acts of socialization (I'Vergesellschaftung") serve this ethical purpose. From this point of view society and the individual may be viewed as "dynamic factors in the realization" of ethical contents.⁵¹

Thus, Voegelin answers the question he raised at the beginning of his dissertation. The object of sociology is not the individual member of society experienced by our senses, but the spirit. Sociology is concerned with imperatives and processes in which spiritual meanings are realized.⁵² As sociologists, so Voegelin, we move in a world of postulates, imperatives and values. Objectifications of the spirit, such as works of science or art, states and economic orders, are

relevant to the sociologists in their character of being points of passage ("Durchgangspankte") for the realization of meaning in the processes described. Institutions are "signs for complexes of meaning", they are "ways to ideas created by individuals in their activity as members of a social relationship" .53

The totality to which the individual belongs is a spiritual process which, principally, can never come to an end, since each new act of the free personalities involved in it

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p . 23.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

lead to new experiences which carry it forward. But the primacy of the whole before the individual remains. For it is only in community that the individual's spirituality is awakened and all spiritual acts, whether direct or mediated through other instances, have as their intentional objects other spiritual beings who are equally involved in the realization of values. To sum up Eric Voegelin's understanding of sociology, as we find it in his dissertation, we may say that in his view, like Leopold von Wiese and Othmar Spann, the issues of naturalism and positivism are dead. They do not even receive mention in his discussion of the theory of sociology. With Othmar Spann, and against von Wiese, Voegelin criticizes "formal sociology" for its failure to address the spiritual sphere, which makes up social reality.

5.1. Othmar Spann and Eric Voegelin: The Religious Roots of Community

One important aspect of Othmar Spann's sociology which is not discussed in Voegelin's dissertation, but which becomes the middle point in works that follow it, is that of the highest "Gezweiung" the unio mystica with God. Spann writes: "Just as a member of a totality points to the totality of which it is a part, so that totality points in its turn to a higher one The center of the highest totality points to God".⁵⁴ This highest form of community orders the spiritual nature of the human being, just as the spiritual nature as a whole [ends meaning to the physical and psychic realms of human nature].⁵⁵

Thus we find in Voegelin's first book, *The Form of the American Mind*, the distinction (borrowed from Scheler) of spheres peripheral to the person and those central. At the heart of this study is the investigation into the American's understanding of God.⁵⁶ Likewise in *Race and State* the statement: "Schelling's doctrine of myth as the ground of being of all peoples or nations seems to us the first profound insight into the religious nature, in the broadest sense, of all community formation".⁵⁷ This key thought is reformulated in his last publication before his enforced exile, *The Political Religions*: "The political community is always integrated in the overall context of human experience of world and God, irrespective of whether the political

sphere occupies a subordinate level in the divine order of the hierarchy of being or whether it is deified itself"⁵⁸.

The thought behind these three examples is that a social science which does not take God into account, fails to take the human into account, for the human being was

⁵⁴ O. Spann, *Gesellschaftslehre*, p. 179.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 184-187.

⁵⁶"A formal Relationship with Puritan Mysticism", chapter three of: Eric Voegelin, *The Form of the American Mind*, (German, 1928). Now in: *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 1, Baton Rouge 1995, here pp. 126-143.

⁵⁷Eric Voegelin, *Race and State*, (German, 1933), now in: *Ibid.*, vol. 2, Columbia, 1997, here pp. 150-151

⁵⁸Eric Voegelin, *The Political Religions*, (German, 1938). Now in: *Ibid.*, vol. 5, pp. 19-75,

created *imago Dei*. This important point was made in an unpublished work which Voegelin worked on ca. 1931-1932, the "Herrschaftslehre" ("Theory of Domination")⁵⁹ According to Voegelin, in the field of social science it is Othmar Spann who has "most clearly and rigorously" explained the spiritual nature of the human being and society. "All the contents of our spirit, and our spirit as a totality, are linked to and contained in a higher spirit."⁶⁰ What a person "is", is found in the experience of God. Therefore, a "philosophically competent attempt to answer the question of what a person is, takes place in a basic form of philosophical thought called meditation m."⁶¹ Voegelin demonstrates this basic form of philosophizing with reference to Books X and XI of St. Augustine's *Confessions*. The experiential character of the meditation must be born in mind: Augustine is not seeking a concept of God, but God. The meditation has a direction; Augustine is moved by "an uneasy heart" to seek peace for his soul. By contemplating the various levels of being- the physical, organic, animal- he discovers that God is not adequately represented in any of them. By means of progressive elimination ("via negativa") the meditating person reaches the deepest recesses of the self. Here he discovers that "his" consciousness is contained in a higher consciousness. In religious terms the individual overcomes the amor sui to open himself to the amor Dei in a double sense: First, in opening himself to God's love, he knows himself held in God's love. Second, in opening his own soul he imitates God, actualizing the godly (caritas) in man. The soul's double opening is the experience which constitutes the human being as *imago Dei*. The knowledge that the human being finds the highest form of community in deo and enters into community with his fellow humans through God, gives a new urgency to Eric Voegelin's criticism of formalistic theories of sociology which neglect the spirit and of naturalistic and positivistic theories which deny it. Let us therefore turn to the criticism of social science from the standpoint of the acts of cognition relevant to faith.

6. Max Scheler: Social Science and Salvation

In a letter to Jakob Taubes in 1953 Eric Voegelin wrote that his studies received an important

impulse ("entscheidende Anregung") from Max Scheler's criticism of

⁵⁹Eric Voegelin, "Herrschaftslehre und Rechtslehre" (ca. 1931-1932). Notes, Typescript and holograph, Eric Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, box 53, file 5.

⁶⁰Eric Voegelin, *Herrschaftslehre*, Section 11, p. 61.

⁶¹Ibid., Section 1, p. 1.

⁶²Eric Voegelin, Letter to Jakob Taubes, 28. February, 1953. In: Eric Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, box 37, file 10. Max Scheler, also a member of the German Society for Sociology, presented his Sociology of Knowledge at the society's bi-annual meeting in 1924. In an acrimonious exchange with Max Adler on the one side and Scheler and Alfred Weber on the other, the society continued its perennial debate on the nature of sociology. Although on Scheler's side against Adler, Alfred Weber in his turn also doubted that Max Scheler had presented a sociological theory, referring to it as "philosophy with a sociological label". See:

Comte's "Law of the three phases" .⁶² In an essay on the "Law of the Three Phases"⁶³ Scheler examines August Comte's claim that the human spirit has progressed from a theological understanding of himself and the world through a philosophical understanding to, at last, a knowledge of himself and the world in terms of positive science. Scheler denies that any one of these modes of understanding could substitute or replace one of the others. All three are equally primary modes of cognition corresponding to three different spheres of "objects". Scheler also distinguishes between three forms of knowledge. The highest form is the knowledge of salvation (*Erlösungswissen*); the second is that of culture, or philosophy (*Bildungswissen*); the third is that of the domination or control of nature (*Leistungs- or Herrschaftswissen*). The lowest form, "Herrschaftswissen", is directed toward the control of phenomena in the realm of the space-time continuum. "*Bildungswissen*" aims at the apriori knowledge of essences. The highest form of cognition, which Scheler calls the "knowledge of salvation", seeks to participate in the ultimate ground of being, the sphere of the absolute or godly being.⁶⁴ That Comte could assume that positive science replaces the other modes and spheres of knowledge, Scheler attributes to the decadent state of Western culture during the last three hundred years which believed that the death of the religious and metaphysical spirit which it observed in its milieu constituted a "law of progress" applicable to human civilization in general.⁶⁵

6.1. Humanitarianism

Thus in an address in 1917 Max Scheler asked his audience to see the World War as a "symbol of the peculiar moral status" of contemporary European man. If the center of our moral life is the commandment, "Thou shall love God with all thy heart and with thy mind and thy neighbour as thyself", then the current situation- a 11 wholesale atrocity the like of which the world" has not seen before- can only fill one "with despair" .⁶⁶ Scheler is of course aware, that there has always been a tension between the spirit of Christianity and the earthly laws of social life. But, according to Scheler, the task of " incorporating the spirit of Christ into visible public life" was given up long ago. Scheler

Verhandlungen des Vierten Deutschen Soziologentages am 29. und 30. September 1924, Tübingen 1925, here p. 216.

⁶³Max Scheler, "Über die Positivistische Geschichtsphilosophie des Wissens (Dreistadiengesetz)". In: Max Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 6., 2. ed., Bern - Munich 1963, pp. 29-35.

⁶⁴Max Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 8, 3. ed., Bern - Munich 1980 pp. 65-68

⁶⁵Max Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 6, p. 32-33.

⁶⁶Max Scheler, "Die Christliche Liebesidee und die gegenwärtige Welt. Ein Vortrag". In: Max Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 5., pp. 355-403, Bern 1954. English: "Christian Love and the Twentieth Century". In: Max Scheler, *On The Eternal in Man*, London 1960, pp. 357-403, here: 360-361.

focuses on the "Christian idea of love", from which the idea of Christian community follows, in order to show how Europe has fallen from this ethos into a new one of which the World War is the clearest expression. Among the most important elements which have contributed to destroying the Christian ethos and creating the new one, he names:

- 1) Humanitarianism taking the place of the Christian commandment of love;
- 2) Individualism and socialism, inasmuch as both attack the Christian idea of the moral solidarity of autonomous persons;
- 3) The "sovereign" State and its "unbounded will";
- 4) Modern political and cultural nationalism which have developed in opposition to the Christian idea that each national culture, though irreplaceable, is complimented by the others;
- 5) "The idea of the 'autonomy' of culture. This has supplanted the ideas and criteria of Christian cultural community, according to which art, philosophy and science should be integrated in the edifice of the ultimate, supreme and all-including human community: the invisible Body of Christ, the Church and its spirit" ,⁶⁷
- 6) The replacement of the organic community by societies based on arbitrary legal contracts;
- 7) The bourgeois-capitalistic economic ethos of unrestricted production and accumulation of capital (whether by individual, State or consortium). This has replaced the Christian notion that various spheres of social activity, including the economic, should be organized in solidarity of aim with the other spheres in order to supply all the needs of the community.

Scheler's historical sketch of how these variegated forces have shaped Europe is made under the leading term of "Humanitarianism". Let us look at the main points of this history.

"Humanitarianism" rebels against the first principle of the Christian commandment of love:

'Love God first above all things'- with the immediate corollary, 'Therefore love your neighbour in God, and always in reference to the highest good.' According to Scheler this revolt developed in the successive stages of the "classical renaissance, in the age of 'humanism', and with special force during the Enlightenment". All of these movements worked to construct an ethos which isolates man from God and indeed often plays man off against God. And even where Christian values seem to have been left in place, there is a change in the emotional and spiritual act called love of one's neighbour.

The primary focus of this love is no longer on the individual's soul and its salvation in solidarity

with all other human beings, but on bodily well being alone. The term "humanity" no longer expresses a link across history to all those who have gone before in a supernatural order including the dead. In this modern "love" man is seen as an external phenomenon. Increasingly man's sensual well being is viewed in isolation from the objective hierarchy of real and spiritual goods, which rises by degrees to the highest good. With this orientation toward the world it comes as no surprise, so Scheler, that soon the love of man is opposed to the love of God. And, at the same time, the inner unity of society begins to crumble.

⁶⁷ Max Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, p. 366.

The seed of this destruction, so Scheler, was sown unwittingly in the Reformation with its emphasis on the individual soul and its faith which removed the entire group of psychic acts which we call social from direct significance for human salvation.⁶⁸ The Enlightenment completed the piecemeal demolition of early Protestantism's disregard of the task of "*inbuilding* God's kingdom into this intractable world".⁶⁹ The Christian tradition prevented the Enlightenment from unfolding its full destruction. But the final anarchy was inevitable".⁷⁰ What else remained? The idea of conflicting groups following their interests or instincts, be they races, nations, states or classes—a picture of fluctuating conflict of every kind. The clearest expression of this "inner condition" of Europe is to be found in the "ideological worlds of Darwin and Marx. And even where the modern mind has not succumbed to Comte's "Law of the Three Phases", it has, by living in the form of knowledge of domination (*Herrschaftswissen*) suffered an atrophy of its aptitude for the acts essential to the knowledge of salvation. Therefore, along with the attempt to overcome positivism itself there is a need to overcome the prejudices which grew in its wake in order that the human learn once again to see the three types of cognition in proper perspective.⁷² An attempt to understand human society without God, as it was developed by Hobbes, the Encyclopaedists, and systematised by Comte, must take an object from the sphere of finite goods, for example, by Comte, the abstraction "humanity", and place it in the absolute sphere. This is an act of idolization. In order to develop the categories we need to describe the full implications of Comte's idolization, I would like to turn to Max Scheler's philosophy of religion. In addition to Humanitarianism three additional issues will concern us here: 2) The intention of Scheler's philosophy of religion, 3) The nature of the religious act, and 4) the proper way of dealing with idols.

6.2. Philosophy of religion

The aim of Scheler's philosophy of religion is to renew natural theology. "This task it can only perform once it has delivered the kernel of Augustinism from the husklike accretions of history, and employed phenomenological philosophy to provide it with a fresh and more deeply rooted foundation. (...) Only a theology of the essential experiences of divinity can open our eyes to the lost truths of Augustine".⁷³ "The... method of successively peeling away the correlates and contraries that are felt to offer progressive indications to the '*phenomenon demonstrandum*', with the consequent laying bare of the phenomenon and its presence to the inspecting mind, is the way which leads to the phenomenological scrutiny of the essence. The indefinability of the X under investigation (*per genus et differentia specifica*) is a sure sign that in this X we have a genuine elementary essence which underlies ultimate concepts but is itself 'inconceivable'. For to 'conceive' means to reduce the object of

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 369ff. 101.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 371.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 372

⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 372.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 351

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.13.

a concept in terms of other concepts".⁷⁴ Scheler points out that the origin of this approach is to be found in Plotinus in the same theological context which interests Scheler. 'Negative theology' arose from the deep conviction" that the divine and holy form "a prime elementary quality which can only be demonstrated by a slow process of elimination and analogy, a quality which must satisfy all concepts of the divine- positive and negative- but itself remains inconceivable" .⁷⁵

6.3. The religious act

The religious act is not derivative of other noetic acts, or of any group of acts found in other contexts. It has its own genuine essence, corresponding to its object as the essential form of apprehending it. Furthermore the religious act is constitutive of human consciousness. According to Scheler there are three unmistakable characteristics of the act of religious cognition which, although they must be expressed negatively, point to the act's positive contents. First, the world-transcending character of its intention. Second, the fact that only an object perceived as "divine" can fulfill the intention. Third, the fact that it can only be fulfilled via the acceptance of a divine kind of entity which is self-revealing ("natural revelation"). Thus, the principle of religious cognition is: "all knowledge of God is knowledge from God".⁷⁶ Scheler expands on these points. In order to fulfill the religious act's intention, the subject committing the religious act must gather all finite and contingent things into a single whole, including the subject's own person, and subsume them under the idea of the 'world'. This is not the empirical world, or the world one knows, but all essential acts and their correlative objects which yield the essence of "world". The idea of the divine as the only correlate to the religious act which can fulfill it refers to the fact that in all acts of thanking, prayer, praise, remorse, etc. which are directed to the divine, the essential object addressed cannot be fulfilled by imagining any finite content of the world- however "magnified" or increased in potency- whether person, nation, nature, etc. as the entity addressed. The religious act is directed to a being who is essentially beyond any finite good of whatever magnitude. In this regard Augustine's heart which cannot rest until it proceeds through all the levels of being belonging to the nature of the world, is the "basic formula" for all religious acts .⁷⁷ Thirdly, the religious act differs from all other cognitive acts in that it demands reciprocity on the part of the object intended. Only when the soul touches God and knows itself touched by God can a religious act (even a natural one) be said to exist .⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 171

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 250-264.

6.4. Shattering the idols

If, as Scheler argues," the religious act is not only a necessary one but indeed the fundamental act of human cognition, there is no question of it not being performed by the individual. The only question which arises is whether it is adequately performed and therefore finds the object to which the act essentially corresponds, or whether it is inadequately performed and one "envisages an object, acclaiming it as divine, as holy, as the absolute good, while it yet conflicts with the nature of the religious act because it belongs to the sphere of finite and contingent goods".⁸⁰ Therefore, Scheler maintains, every person either believes in God or in an idol. And he establishes the pedagogical rule that the correct way of guiding one to faith is to show the person, or a typical class of person, that he has placed a finite good in place of God, that within the objective sphere of the absolute, which every person has, the person has 'deified' a particular good. In helping the person to discover this idol and to shatter it, one helps the person to return to the natural faith in God. For, though belief in God (orientation of the person's spiritual nucleus to the infinite being and good in faith, hope, love, etc.) has no specific, positive cause in the psychic history of man, such a cause certainly underlies disbelief in God, or rather the permanent self-delusion of putting a finite good ... in the place of God, or of treating it 'as if ' it were God".⁸¹ Once the idol is shattered and the mind is freed from the "order of values that enslaved" the heart, the religious act - so Scheler- turns from this idolization "in spontaneous quest of its proper object, the idea of God". Thus, the correct method for all religious initiation, the method which must precede any kind of instruction concerning religion, is not 'proof', but the "awakening and activation of the religious act, the guiding of it to its proper object and objective good".⁸² Let us look at Eric Voegelin's relationship to these four points.

7. Eric Voegelin and Max Scheler compared

1) Humanitarianism.

Concerning the nature of the last three hundred years of Western civilization Voegelin agrees with Scheler that the falling away from God has led to the current age of atrocity". In 1975 Voegelin wrote: "The development of a nominalist and fideist conception of Christianity is the cultural disaster, with its origins in the late Middle Ages, that provokes the reaction of alienated existence in the dogmatic form of the ideologies, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries".⁸³ In 1951 Voegelin expressed this thought in his criticism of Max Weber's sociology: He noted that Weber's extensive studies of religion omitted pre-Reformation Christianity and he suggested that the reason for the omission was to be found in the fact that value-free science, itself a child of modern irrationalism, would collapse in the face of reason still intact. The attack on metaphysics can be undertaken with a good conscience only from the safe distance of imperfect knowledge. The horizon of Weber's social science was

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Eric Voegelin, "Response to Professor Altizer's 'A New History and a New but Ancient God'. In: *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 12, Baton Rouge, 1990, p. 295.

immense; all the more does his caution in coming too close to its decisive center reveal its positivistic limitations".⁸⁴

Scheler argued further that the guilt which had accrued to Western man for turning his face from God had grown to the point where occidental man did not dare to "feel or think- much less expiate it". This guilt, so Scheler, confronted him as an almost "objective force", appearing to him as an external power or 'fate'. This experience of hiding guilt from oneself found, according to Scheler, its expression in the historico-deterministic social theories of the time.⁸⁵ Voegelin has made the insight that modern social thought is a mask for derailed faith, whether in Comte, Marx, Nietzsche or Hegel, the pivotal point of his analyses of these thinkers: "in the modern state of alienation, the enterprise of self-salvation dominates the concern with history and meaning".⁸⁶

2) Philosophy of religion

Following Scheler's intention to free Augustinism from the husklike accretions of history and employ phenomenological philosophy to provide it with a fresh and more deeply rooted foundation, Voegelin has explored "the essential experiences of divinity".⁸⁷ He has pointed out that the social thought of Plato and Aristotle find their center in experiences of transcendental godly being. "When the philosopher explores the spiritual order of the soul, he explores a realm of experiences which he can appropriately describe only in the language of symbols expressing the movement of the soul toward transcendental reality and the flooding of the soul by transcendence. At the border of transcendence the language of philosophical anthropology must become the language of religious symbolization".⁸⁸

3) The religious act

Therefore Voegelin's studies aiming, like Scheler's, to explore the maximum opening of the soul for the cognitive acts which bring him closer to God, focus on the pre-Reformation Christian experience of divinity which had further differentiated the knowledge of salvation attained by the mystical philosophers of Hellas to include an understanding of God's Grace: "The experience of mutuality in the relation with God, of the *amicitia* in the Thomistic sense, of the grace that imposes a supernatural form on the nature of man, is the specific difference of Christian truth.(...) The critical authority over the older truth of society that the soul had gained through its opening and its orientation toward the unseen measure was now confirmed through the revelation of the measure itself".⁸⁹

⁸⁴Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*. In: *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 5, p. 103.

⁸⁵Max Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, pp. 59-60.

⁸⁶Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4, Baton Rouge 1974, p. 255.

⁸⁷Compare Max Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, p. 13.

⁸⁸Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 3, Baton Rouge 1957, p. 363.

⁸⁹Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, pp. 150-151. Compare *Order and History*, vol. 4, pp. 239-272 et passim.

4) Shattering the Idols

The experiences of the Christian mystics mark the high point of the understanding of man as a

being whose essence is his orientation to the Beyond of this world from which knowledge of the order of the world, the order of the soul and the order of society flow. "In man's consciousness, the foundational movement within reality from the physical depth becomes luminous for the creative constitution of all reality from the height of the divine ground".⁹⁰ Proceeding from this orientation Voegelin analyses the thinkers who have obscured the relationship between man and God and substituted inner worldly idols for Christian faith. In substantial studies Eric Voegelin has investigated the writings of Comte, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche in order to demonstrate how the intention of the religious act toward world transcending divine reality was derailed into immanent speculation.⁹¹

Representative for the method employed in these studies is that of the essay comparing Nietzsche and Pascal.⁹² In a letter to Karl Lowith Voegelin explained that he had undertaken the comparison in order to confront the *theologia negativa* of such thinkers as Meister Eckhart, Nicholas of Cusa and, "most importantly Augustine" with Nietzsche's deliberate avoidance of the problem of Grace.⁹³

In summing up Eric Voegelin's work in relationship to Max Scheler's philosophy, we must emphasize the connection between the religious acts, historical studies and the criticism of modern social science. Not only had the centuries of "Humanitarianism" obscured the knowledge of salvation, but the social sciences which developed within

⁹⁰Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4, p. 334.

⁹¹ In the letter to Taubes, quoted above, Voegelin directly relates these studies to the "decisive impulse" his thought received from Max Scheler's criticism of the comtian "Law of the Three Phases": "In contrast to Comte, Scheler draws the conclusion that the truths which were discovered in the theological and metaphysical phases must be carefully protected because the positive phase is so obviously sterile in these areas. When today we find no creations ("Schöpfungen") comparable to the Greek and Jewish-Christian experiences, that is not an argument against their truth. Or as I would put it, especially in relationship to Marx, Comte and Nietzsche, turning spiritual impotence into a spiritual principle (geistige Impotenz zum geistigen Prinzip) - that is the 'modern' madness (der 'modern e' Wahnsinn)." Voegelin to Taubes, 28. February 1953. Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, box 37, file 10. For Voegelin's studies of Comte and Marx see: Eric Voegelin, *Crisis and Apocalypse, History of Political Ideas*, vol. VI 11, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 26, Columbia 1999, pp. 161-251/303-373. For Nietzsche see: Eric Voegelin, *The Last Orientation, The History of Political Ideas*, vol. VII, [ibid., vol. 25, Columbia 1999, pp. 251-305. For Hegel see: "On Hegel: A Study in Sorcery". In: Eric Voegelin, *Published Essays 1966-1985*. Ibid., vol. 12, pp. 213-256; also: Eric Voegelin, *Order And History*, vol. 5, 1985, pp. 54-70 et passim.

⁹² Eric Voegelin, "Nietzsche and Pascal". Written in 1943, this essay was first published in: Eric Voegelin, *The Last Orientation, The History of Political Ideas*, vol. VI I, pp. 251-305, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 25.

⁹³ Eric Voegelin to Karl Lowith, 17. December 1944. Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, box 24, file 4.

the ethos of "Humanitarianism", led to "historico-deterministic" systems of social thought which presented themselves as the "fate" of Western civilization. In the form of "Occidental Rationalism", or the "Proletarian Revolution" or the "Age of Positivism" -and others- these systems became man's excuse for not facing the guilt that was his for turning away from God. According to Scheler, it is characteristic of guilt that the more it grows the more the guilty party hides its burden from himself. And just as an individual can only break his guilt by looking on his past in a new spirit, so nations and societies must do the same. Following the First World War, Scheler investigated the act of repentance as a means, not only for individuals, but also for societies to return to God. Scheler pointed out that memory is not a mechanical process of "association" or of mere psychological functions. When we turn to the past it is our spirit ("Geist") which casts light on what has been forgotten. When we remember in a new spirit we recall things which otherwise would not have come to light. For although events in the past are, in their physical aspects, over and closed for all time, their meaning is incomplete. As long as humankind exists, each event can be taken up in the new totality of meaning which later insight, born of repentance and hope, can open.⁹⁴

Eric Voegelin continues the work inaugurated by Max Scheler's philosophy of religion. Therefore Eric Voegelin's historical studies take as their starting point the pre-Reformation Christianity which Scheler had pointed to as the period still spiritually intact. Of course Voegelin's studies went much further into the past than the periods indicated by Scheler. But the motive is the same: to uncover the lost knowledge of salvation. This search is itself the most powerful criticism of modern social thought. For both the return to past periods of spiritual order and the criticism of the contemporary disorder depend on the "revolution of the spirit".⁹⁵ With the notion of the "conversio", the revolution of the spirit, I would like to conclude this study with a final remark on Eric Voegelin's work in its relation to the symbol *Gesit*".

8. Conclusion

I have tried to sketch a line of development in Eric Voegelin's thought from his dissertation to his most mature work along the admittedly narrow thread of sociology. Of course Eric Voegelin was open to, and learned from, other disciplines and sources. But I have tried to show that his early training was particularly conducive to and supportive of such an unfolding and deepening which resulted in his magnum opus, *Order and History*, and his late essays and lectures. The reasons for this are four fold. 1. Following Othmar Spann, Eric Voegelin's sociology focuses on the spirit, in the

⁹⁴Max Scheler, "Repentance and Rebirth". in: Max Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, pp. 33-67.

⁹⁵Compare: "Without the revolution of the spirit we cannot overcome our distress". Eric Voegelin, "The German University and the order of German Society: A Reconsideration of the Nazi Era" (German, 1966). Now in: *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 12, pp. 1-36, here: p. 4.

most pregnant sense of that symbol. He defines society, and the individual's role in society, as the deepening of spiritual meaning. (Later he would refer to this communal activity under the

term of "substantial communication", contrasting it and opposing it to "pragmatic communication" and communication as an "intoxicant".) ⁹⁶

2. The basis and the center of the meanings which are to be deepened are found in the transcendental experiences of divinity- Othmar Spann's "Gezweiung" with God in the unio mystica, Max Scheler's insights into the nature of the religious act transcending all that is of "the world". This insight led to Scheler's emphasis on the role of negative theology, as well as to the doctrine of "shattering the idols", in order show the way, and to free the person to return to the essential cognitive acts by which man prepares himself for reception of the divine ("Erlösungswissen").

3. Eric Voegelin was persuaded by Scheler's criticism of Comte's "Law of the three phases" that it constitutes one of the idols of modern Western civilization; a science of man without God. It is idolatry because it places a contingent, worldly, good (so-called "mankind") in the sphere of the Absolute. As a consequence it is also bad social science, for it obscures the realm of being in which the experiences are made which lead to individual and social order. It denies the insight of St. Augustine, that the heart is uneasy until it finds peace in God.

4. An adequate science of the human being can only be developed where faith seeks understanding, and the rational ground of faith is found in the experiences of divinity. Augustine, as Voegelin pointed out, is not searching for a "concept of God", but for God. Such a search involves the "conversio", the overcoming of the love of self, closed to God, to attain the opening to God which allows one to find one's fellow human beings "in deo". Without the conversion the intellect confines itself to too narrow a spiritual horizon. Eric Voegelin's sociology becomes a philosophy of individual and social order because it seeks to understand "Geist" in the full amplitude of that symbol's meaning; that given to it in St. Paul's "vision of the resurrected". To underline the nature of the "spirit" which is Eric Voegelin's scholarly and existential concern, he has placed the following words of St. Augustine at the beginning of each of the five volumes of *Order and History*: "In the study of creature one should not exercise a vain and perishing curiosity, but ascend toward what is immortal and everlasting".⁹⁸

⁹⁶"Necessary Moral Basis for Communication in a Democracy". In: *The Collected Works of Ethic Voegelin*, vol. 11, Columbia 2000, pp. 47-59.

⁹⁷ Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. 4, pp. 239-272.

⁹⁸ St. Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, quoted in: *Order and History*, vols. 1-5, frontispiece.