

❖ Liberal Democracy, Secularization, and ❖ The End of Metaphysics ❖

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Liberal Democracy and Political Theology

Remarks on Eric Voegelin's Reception of Carl Schmitt

The question of the significance of Carl Schmitt for Eric Voegelin's political theory has frequently been raised by interpreters of Voegelin's work (especially during the last decade ❖ parallel with the renaissance and the growing importance of Schmitt's work in the theoretical discourse in general). To many observers there seem to be significant parallels regarding some crucial concepts in the respective writings of the two thinkers. Some (German) scholars even tried to characterize Voegelin's approach as being ❖ at least in substantial parts ❖ a ❖ political theology ❖ in the Schmittian sense of the term.¹ [1]

1 [1] Albrecht Kiel, *Gottesstaat und Pax Americana. Zur politischen Theologie von Carl Schmitt und Eric Voegelin*, Cuxhaven & Dartford 1998; Richard Faber, *Der Prometheus-Komplex. Zur Kritik der Politologie Eric Voegelins und Hans Blumenbergs*, Würzburg 1984; Michael Henkel, *Eric Voegelin zur Einführung*, Hamburg 1998; ders., *Staatslehre und Kritik der Moderne: Voegelins Auseinandersetzung mit Ideologien und Autoritarismus in den dreißiger Jahren*, in: PVS, 41. Jahrgang, Heft 4, Dez. 2000, S. 745 ❖ 763. Robert Chr. van Ooyen on the other hand, in his very interesting recent essay understands Voegelin's conception of ❖ political religions ❖ as criticizing both, Kelsen's positivism and Schmitt's political theology from his own third position as a critic of ideologies, thereby using Schmitt against Kelsen and vice versa. (Robert Chr. van Ooyen, *Totalitarismuskritik gegen Kelsen und Schmitt: Eric Voegelins ❖ politische Religionen ❖ als Kritik an Rechtspositivismus und politischer Theologie*, in: *Zeitschrift für Politik*, Heft 1, März 2002, S. 56-82.) I think that van Ooyen, although his analysis is very rewarding and clarifying, still makes the mistake to understand the early Voegelin too much from the retrospective from the later Voegelin, and therefore

I think that this characterization rather confuses than clarifies the relationship between the two thinkers. This is partly due to the general problem that it does not seem to be always very clear what the phrase "political theology" actually is supposed to mean. Not only in Schmitt's own work, but even more so in the literature on him, the term appears to have several different and to a certain degree inconsistent meanings and connotations. Most of the mentioned interpreters of Voegelin as a "political theologian", however, seem to refer to the renowned interpretation of Schmitt's "political theology" by Heinrich Meier who himself referred to Leo Strauss and his idea of political philosophy as the counterpart of Schmitt's political theology.² [2] I think that this emphasis in the understanding of Schmitt is not apt to clarify Voegelin's early reception of Schmitt, and that is: to clarify both, his interest in Schmitt as well as his fundamental critique of his work.

Besides the theoretical aspects, of course, many observers rather focus on the "political" aspect of the question at hand, that is: the question of Voegelin's and Schmitt's respective "political position" or "political attitude" regarding the crisis of the central European societies in the 1920s and 1930s, regarding the struggle between various democratic, socialist and authoritarian movements for instance in Germany and Austria at that time and, finally, regarding the rise of National Socialism. In the center of this "political" aspect stands Voegelin's book *The Authoritarian State* from 1936, where he in a way takes position for the Dolfu regime.

In my paper I nonetheless want to focus on the first, the theoretical aspect of the question and only give some hints regarding the second. That second, the "political" aspect can anyway only be adequately answered on the basis of such an analysis of the theoretical relationship between the two thinkers. I hope to be able to show this in my paper.

overemphasises the aspect of critique of ideologies while missing the significance of the epistemological peculiarities of Voegelin's early writings.

2 [2] Heinrich Meier, Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss und der "Begriff des Politischen". Zu einem Dialog unter Abwesenden, Stuttgart 1988; ders., Die Lehre Carl Schmitts. Vier Kapitel zur Unterscheidung politischer Theologie und politischer Philosophie, Stuttgart 1994.

My argument, in short, is that Voegelin indeed was interested in some parts of Schmitt's work and that a certain influence of Schmittian conceptions is discernable in Voegelin's writings in some of his early and even in some of his later writings. Not only does Voegelin explicitly refer to Carl Schmitt in several of his early works³ [3], but especially in his *Authoritarian State* from 1936 he also uses some Schmittian concepts in his own analysis, as for instance: Schmitt's distinction of legality and legitimacy, furthermore the concept of the political demos, the administrative style of the Austrian democracy, its problem of suspended decisions and so on⁴ [4]. To give only one example from his later writings: Voegelin's concept of existential representation in *The New Science of Politics* with its emphasis on the very basic existential dimension of political reality and a certain necessary logic of self-preservation of political communities resembles to a certain degree, one could argue, Schmitt's concept of political existence.⁵ [5]

Thus there are some conceptual similarities between Schmitt and Voegelin, and this is particularly the case regarding some of Voegelin's early writings. But these similarities, firstly, concern Schmitt's existential analysis of political reality and of the state and not, as most interpreters seem to presume, the issue of a critique of modernity and secularization, and not even primarily the relationship between politics and religion. And, secondly, besides these similarities there are, on the other hand, significant conceptual differences, and only in the context of these differences the significance of the parallels can be properly understood. I will try to show this in a first step by a very brief account of Voegelin's and Schmitt's respective conceptions of modern democracy.

3 [3] In his unfinished and unpublished Introduction to *Staatslehre als Geisteswissenschaft* Voegelin even refers to Carl Schmitt as being one of the proponents of a geisteswissenschaftlichen approach in political theory and thus of a similar approach than his own. See Voegelin, *Staatslehre als Geisteswissenschaft*, Hoover Institution (HI) 53.7, p. 1. See also below.

4 [4] Erich Voegelin, *Der Autoritäre Staat, Ein Versuch über das österreichische Staatsproblem*, Wien 1936, pp. 89 ff., 95, 100.

5 [5] Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, Chicago 1952, pp. 27 ff.

These conceptual differences can be traced down to more fundamental differences in the respective ideas of political theory in general. Already the early Voegelin himself explicitly points out these differences, for instance in his reception of Carl Schmitt's *Verfassungslehre* of 1928. Voegelin's essay, written in 1931, is both, a positive evaluation of parts of Schmitt's analytical work *and* a fundamental critique of his general approach. For Voegelin's critique two points are decisive: 1. While Schmitt's methodical approach towards political reality is substantially *collectivistic*, Voegelin's methodical approach, on the contrary, can be characterized as being *personalistic*. And 2.: Voegelin criticizes Schmitt's theoretical position as an *immanent* position and juxtaposes it with his own *transcendent* position. Considering these decisive differences, Voegelin's paradigmatic figure of the *political thinker* turns out to be the exact opposite of a Schmittian *political theologian*.

1. The problem of modern democracy

While it does not appear too difficult to characterize Carl Schmitt's understanding of modern democracy, this question is a very intricate one with regard to Eric Voegelin. His use of the term is a rather ambivalent one, and there are different meanings of *democracy* distinguishable in his early writings. The predominant one is that of *modern democracy* denoting the historical type of *civil regime* developed in the modern Western nations. But there are also some passages where he uses the term to point at the *collectivistic* dynamics of the central European development at the time. And finally there seems to be a rather formalistic meaning of democracy, close to the meaning of Voegelin's concept of *nation*. In order to clarify these different meanings I need to make a few remarks on Voegelin's general theoretical perspective.

Voegelin's approach of a political science as a *geisteswissenschaftliche Staatslehre*⁶ [6] focusses on the historical genesis and the *meaningful* function of cultural and political symbols and

⁶ [6] Voegelin's early approach is influenced by several European sociological and philosophical thinkers and traditions. Not all of these influences are equally obvious, and not all of them are equally considered in the literature on Voegelin. Generally rather underrated influences, I think, are for instance: the phenomenological and *wissenssoziologische* tradition of sociological theory in the 1920s and 1930s, furthermore the tradition of hermeneutical philosophy since Wilhelm Dilthey. And, finally, the significance of Max Weber for the early Voegelin, I think, can hardly be overrated.

ideas as the most fundamental, the constitutive dimension of political reality. A political community for Voegelin first of all is a meaningful structure of political ideas and beliefs that forms the basis for the specific institutions and political habits, for the political life of a society in general. Voegelin's perspective in this respect resembles in a way the wissenssoziologischen approaches of, for instance, Karl Mannheim or Alfred Schütz.⁷ [7] But other than the primarily sociologically interested theories of these thinkers, Voegelin's approach is explicitly *political*, and that basically means: 1. it is focussed on the decisive function of ideas for the working of political institutions and 2. and more fundamentally: it is focussed on the *generative processes* of political communities as meaningful units. Political communities for Voegelin not only are primarily meaningful structures of political ideas and beliefs, but are as such self-integrating entities, permanently creating and asserting their unity by an ongoing process of symbolization and articulation. This character as self-constituting entities is the very political dimension in a fundamental sense of social reality. Thus, Voegelin's early political theory can be characterized as a constitutive theory of states in this sense.

Voegelin emphasises that the different meaningful structures as a unit, as building up a specific society that is discernable as a political entity, are ordered around a meaningful center, which consists of the socially dominant and unquestioned ideas and beliefs regarding the most fundamental questions of political existence and human existence in general:⁸ [8] Like, first of all, the fundamental idea of the society as actually being such a meaningful unit at all (the idea of the *Sinneinheit*), furthermore ideas regarding the significance and position of this unit within the world and the cosmos, and, finally, the fundamental ideas concerning the significance and position of the individual person within the political community as a meaningful unit.⁹ [9]

7 [7] Karl Mannheim, *Ideologie und Utopie*, Bonn² 1930; Alfred Schütz, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*, Frankfurt a.M.⁶ 1993.

8 [8] Voegelin, *Über die Form des amerikanischen Geistes*, Tübingen 1928, pp. 7 ff; ders., *National Types of Mind*, unpublished manuscript, 1930 (?), HI 52.10.

9 [9] Voegelin, zur Lehre von den Staatsformen, in: *Zeitschrift für öffentliches Recht*, Band VI, Heft 4, 1927, pp. 600 ff. See also Voegelin, *History of Political Ideas*, Vol. 1, in: *CW Vol. 19*, p. 226: The scope and the details of (political ideas) vary widely, but their general structure remains the same throughout history, The permanent general structure comprises three sets of ideas: the ideas concerning the constitution of the cosmos as a whole; the ideas concerning the

From this meaningful center derives the formative principle that penetrates a society and determines its peculiar form as a political community, that is: its specific form or type of mind as a political nation. Thus, political science for Voegelin above all has to deal with such historically generated meaningful structures as self-integrating (evocative) entities nations, or later: civilizations each being characterized by its specific type of mind. The analytical concepts of such a political science of national types of mind (as Voegelin puts it in one of the most interesting of his early unpublished manuscripts¹⁰ [10]) are hermeneutical and historical categories on the basis of a broad comparative empirical perspective, focussing on this constitutive dimension of political reality.

For Voegelin the term democracy therefore, besides pointing at specific institutions and characteristics of a political system, primarily describes specific features of political meaningful structures in this sense.¹¹ [11] Modern democracy is a specific set of beliefs and ideas, forming the basis for specific institutions and political habits. These features are always historically developed features of concrete societies. A study of democracy therefore necessarily has to be a comparative historical case study.

For Voegelin now, the paradigmatic historical examples of modern democracy in this sense are the Western liberal democracies, particularly the American society as he interpreted it in his book on the Form of the American Mind. I cannot go too deep into the various results of Voegelin's analysis. Suffice to mention Voegelin's identification of the open self as the formative principle of the American Mind. This principle basically expresses specific ideas understanding the relationship between the individual person, the political community, the world and, finally God or transcendence as a substantially open and interrelated relationship.¹² [12] This feature is the core of the significance of

internal order; the ideas concerning the status of the cosmos in the simultaneous world and in history.

¹⁰ [10] Voegelin, National Types of Mind, HI 52.10.

¹¹ [11] For Voegelin's early understanding of comparative types of regimes in general see Voegelin, Zur Lehre von der Staatsformen, a.a.O., 572-608.

¹² [12] Voegelin, über die Form des amerikanischen Geistes, Tübingen 1928, pp. 7 ff., 14 ff.

the American mind as a meaningful structure. Its various ramifications in the different spheres of the social, intellectual and political life integrates the American society as a meaningful entity and a political community. From this core also derives the meaning of the democratic institutions. Voegelin identifies particularly the crucial significance of the *individual as a person* that emerges from this formative principle as the core idea of Western liberal democracy.¹³ [13]

This empirical and theoretical complex which I could only roughly sketch here is the background before which Voegelin analyzes the situation of the young democracies in central Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. But here, as Voegelin's geisteswissenschaftliche analysis points out, the situation is fundamentally different in several respects, and these differences are the deeper reason for the critical state of, for instance, the young Austrian democracy.

First of all, a strong meaningful center, consisting of a set of fundamental political ideas and beliefs that penetrate society down to a significant majority of the people and thus integrate it to a political community, has not yet developed. There is no historically deep rooted and socially dominant Austrian idea of the political community and of the individual person as a citizen within this community. Austria, as Voegelin puts it, is not a nation in the real sense of the term.¹⁴ [14] As a consequence the democratic institutions lack the basis of a corresponding socially dominant set of democratic beliefs from which they would draw their existential political meaning.

This first characteristic of the Austrian situation is a rather formal one, pointing at a lack of intensity of the existential meaningful formation of the Austrian society. Voegelin's crucial concept in this respect, the concept of nation is a formal concept expressing the intensity of penetration of a society with the formative political ideas, without identifying specific contents of ideas or beliefs.¹⁵ [15]

¹³ [13] Ebd.; see also below (Voegelin 1935, footnote No. 16) and Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, a.a.O., p., 40 f., where Voegelin speaks of the peculiar Western idea of every individual as a representable unit.

¹⁴ [14] Voegelin, *Der autoritäre Staat*, a.a.O., pp. 1 ff.; also ders., *Die österreichische Verfassungsreform von 1929*, in: *Zeitschrift für Politik*, Bd. XIX, Heft 9, 1930, p 585; also ders., *The change in the Ideas on Government and constitution in Austria since 1918*, unpublished manuscript, 1937, HI 55,22, pp. 1 ff.

¹⁵ [15] Ebd., also in general Voegelin, *National Types of Mind*, a.a.O.

This intensity of penetration, the **totality of Weltanschauung**¹⁶ [16] for Voegelin is the formal characteristic of modern democracy in general. Every modern democratic society necessarily is a **nation** in this sense, is integrated by an idea that penetrates society down to the single individual. It is this formalistic level of Voegelin's analysis that to a certain degree resembles parts Schmitt's approach, and the Schmittian terms Voegelin uses can be located on this formalistic level. But there is a second characteristic of the Austrian **and in general the central European** situation, that fundamentally distinguishes it from the Western situation. This second characteristic concerns the content of the pivotal ideas regarding the political meaning of the individual person.

In spite of the current lack of intensity of existential penetration Voegelin discerns a new type of somewhat democratic ideas developing in central Europe. But the content of this new set of ideas and beliefs that seems to determine the historical process of central European societies becoming **nations** are fundamentally different from the ideas of the Western civil regime. In an essay from 1935 Voegelin describes this emerging central European **type of mind** (as the integrative principle of a **political people**) as the type of **Reichsvolk** and distinguishes it from the type of **Staatsnation** as the peculiar type of the Western civil regimes:

Due to the different historical location of their respective processes of nation-building the two types can be distinguished by their fundamentally different formative ideas on the relationship between the individual and the community. While in the Western case **the activation of a people to a nation** happened under the impact of ideas from the 18th century or earlier, ideas that understand the political human being still essentially as a **person**, the activation of the **Reichsvolk** takes place primarily under the impact of political ideas from the 19th century, in which the significance and value of the singular person has to stand back behind the character of man as a part of a collective body.¹⁷ [17]

Considering these two general characteristics of the central European situation, Voegelin's **position** regarding the Austrian case can be understood as follows: First: Austria is not a **nation** and therefore simply cannot be governed by a modern democratic regime. Secondly: The historical

16 [16] Voegelin, *Der autoritäre Staat*, a.a.O., p. 23.

17 [17] Voegelin, *Rasse und Staat*, in: Otto Klemm (Hrsg.), *Psychologie und Gemeinschaftsleben*, Jena 1935, pp. 91-104, here: pp. 98 f.

process of central European societies becoming nations is determined by a 19th century type of collectivistic political ideas and tends towards a fundamentally different type of modern democracy. The Austrian liberal democratic constitution of 1920, (primarily worked out by Hans Kelsen,) therefore is an empty, purely administrative body of liberal democratic institutions, laws and rules that derives its content, its real existentially political meaning from other, substantially antiliberal and antidemocratic (in the Western sense) sources.¹⁸ [18] Austria, to put it in a simple formula, is a liberal democracy without liberal democrats. This situation, as a particular period of Austria's historical development of becoming a nation, for Voegelin momentarily requires a rather authoritarian regime to substitute the lack of national political consciousness and to foster the process of integration of Austrian society into an existential political community as a meaningful unit. And, in addition, it was Voegelin's conviction, that only such a development could prevent the Anschluss by Nazi-Germany.¹⁹ [19]

This central European collectivistic type, on the contrary, is the paradigmatic model of Carl Schmitt's conception of modern democracy. Schmitt develops his understanding of democracy on the basis of a radical and polemical critique of liberalism, constitutionalism and parliamentarianism in general as actually being non-democratic, even apolitical or antipolitical institutions and ideas.²⁰ [20] The real, existentially political idea of democracy under the conditions of industrialized modern societies for him can only be the new type of collectivistic democracy.

Now this understanding of democracy of Schmitt is empirically based on the central European situation of the time. And in a way it corresponds with this empirical situation. This is a crucial point. Indeed, as also Voegelin's critique of the Austrian democratic constitution of 1920 points out, the young central European liberal democracies are in a way apolitical or antipolitical, merely administrative regimes,

¹⁸ [18] See, for instance, Voegelin, Die österreichische Verfassungsreform von 1929, a.a.O., p. 587; ders., The Change in the Ideas on Government and Constitution in Austria since 1918, a.a.O., pp. 5 ff.

¹⁹ [19] Voegelin, The Change in the Ideas on Government and Constitution in Austria since 1918, a.a.O., p. 12.

²⁰ [20] See Carl Schmitt, Verfassungslehre, Berlin 1928; ders., Die geistige Lage des heutigen Parlamentarismus, München und Leipzig² 1923; ders., Der Begriff des Politischen, München 1932.

but not because they are liberal democracies (as Schmitt argues), but because they lack the crucial existential premises on which the democratic institutions must rest. They either are not yet modern nations in Voegelin's sense at all, or if they are, or are about to become nations, their predominant type of mind is substantially not compatible with the liberal democratic institutions of a civil regime. The existential meaning of these institutions, on the other hand, cannot be understood on the limited empirical basis of the central European situation, but only in the cultural, intellectual and political context of their historical genesis, and that means: can only be understood with regard to the historical type of mind the Western type of mind of which they are specific political ramifications.

Thus, from a Voegelinian perspective one could say that Schmitt adopts the reduced, merely administrative, merely formalistic central European understanding of liberal democratic institutions in order to prove their principally antipolitical or at least anachronistic nature. His critique, if you will, is based on a central European provincialism, to use another Voegelinian term. The aim of his critique is the creation of a new antiliberal concept of democracy. As Voegelin puts it in an unpublished manuscript from 1929/1930:

There may be back of Schmitt's concepts the desire to discredit the checks of power by associating them with liberalism as an antiquated political idea, and to open the way, under the title of democracy, to dictatorial experiments. Schmitt is a very careful man and does not go too far into the consequences of his theory. The rather significant attempt, however, to form a new concept of democracy, now the fighting value of the old one has been exhausted, is undeniable; Schmitt forms even the very useful concept of constitutional democracy in analogy to constitutional monarchy, meaning thereby a democracy with a liberal section in its constitution, the table of the rights of man. And again this union of words - constitutional democracy - opens the possibility that they may be dissociated eventually, and one day we shall have democracy without any limits to the governmental power. When we should go on in the direction of Schmitt's attempt, and try to define what is democracy more precisely than he does, we might perhaps arrive at a political order where, not going into details of organisation, masses of people follow one or more political leaders because of his or their personal authority. The organisation may be rather similar to that of an absolute monarchy, the decisive difference being that the belief in the sacrosanct person of the monarch, the belief in a dynasty, in legitimate succession to

power etc., are gone and replaced by an immediate attachment to the personal qualities of the statesman in power. The Italy of Mussolini e.g. would be a model democracy - the application of force to keep the government in power would not be an argument to the contrary, just as it would not be an argument against absolute monarchy that a king keeps himself in his position by force.²¹ [21]

So, to conclude, in Schmitt there is a clear preference discernable for the central European type of collectivistic democracy, while his critique of political liberalism lacks the empirical basis of the paradigmatic Western societies and therefore lacks an understanding of the existential meaning of liberal democracy. Voegelin as well criticizes the central European liberal democracies, and in his critique he uses several Schmittian terms in order to demonstrate the existential emptiness of, for instance, the Austrian constitution of 1920. But this critique is imbedded in Voegelin's historical and comparative perspective that comprises a thorough hermeneutical analysis of the Western civil regime as a paradigmatic example of modern democracy. For the early Voegelin the respective situations of the Western societies on the one hand and of the central European societies on the other are fundamentally different. There are the similar conditions of the integrative process of modern industrialized societies into political nations, but there are fundamental differences regarding the historical origin and the meaning of the respective formative political ideas. Democratic experiments as Kelsen's liberal democratic constitution for Austria necessarily must fail as long as they ignore these fundamental differences.

This outline does not yet fully answer the question of Voegelin's exact political position in the Austrian case or regarding the central European development in the 1930s in general, but it should have sufficed to demonstrate some fundamental differences between Voegelin's and Schmitt's perspective in these questions. And these differences in their respective understanding of modern democracy point at more general differences on the methodical and theoretical level of their political thinking. Voegelin himself in his essay on Schmitt's *Verfassungslehre* has explicitly and critically distinguished his own approach from Schmitt's conception regarding two decisive aspects. The first

21 [21] Voegelin, *National Types of Mind*, a.a.O., pp. 313 f.

aspect concerns the general structure of political reality and the problem of Schmitt's general methodical orientation.

2. The general structure of political reality

On the one hand Voegelin understands Schmitt's approach as the important attempt to overcome the reductionist perspective of the predominant positivistic theory of the time.²² [22] For Voegelin Schmitt's writings therefore are, as well as his own, the attempt to establish a geisteswissenschaftliche political theory that is able to penetrate political reality down to its most fundamental dimension, viz. the dimension of the symbolic self-generation of political communities. But, on the other hand, Schmitt's attempt in Voegelin's view fails to accomplish this aim. Schmitt's analysis, instead of focussing on the self-emerging elements of states as meaningful units, breaks off at this decisive point and instead sets the apriori construction of political existence and his collectivistic concept of decision as the final points of reference.²³ [23]

For Schmitt the fundamental elements or real entities (Realeinheiten is Voegelin's term here) that determine the general structure (Gegebenheitsweise) of political reality are political units as collective bodies.²⁴ [24] The concept of political existence therefore for Schmitt has primarily the meaning of an apriori-premise that sets the political community as the original entity from which the analysis has to start. For Voegelin, on the contrary, the most fundamental characteristic of political communities (of states) is that they are not real entities in this somewhat ontological sense. The only real entities that determine the general structure of political reality are human beings, individual persons. For Voegelin the term political existence therefore primarily describes the fact that there are institutions, political

²² [22] Voegelin, Die Verfassungslehre von Carl Schmitt. Versuch einer konstruktiven Analyse ihrer staatstheoretischen Prinzipien, in: Zeitschrift für öffentliches Recht, Band XI, Heft 1, 1931, pp. 93 ff.

²³ [23] Ebd., pp. 96 ff.

²⁴ [24] Ebd.

communities, meaningful structures apparently emerging from and determining the interrelation between persons. Although these structures are relatively independent from single individuals, they still are, as Voegelin stresses, "amorphous" phenomena.²⁵ [25] Political communities are not "real entities", but self-integrating "meaningful units", permanently actualized and realized in the minds, ideas and actions of persons. This permanent process of actualization, of meaningful self-creation is the crucial object of a "geisteswissenschaftliche Staatslehre". This very process gets eclipsed by Schmitt's apriori collectivistic constructions.²⁶ [26]

One can say that the crucial significance of the "person" that Voegelin identifies as a central political idea within the Western "type of mind" here in a way finds its theoretical equivalent within Voegelin's understanding of the fundamental structure of political reality. Besides pointing at this anglo-saxon context, the concept of "person" bears a wide range of connotations. It refers to a whole tradition with its origin in the early christian philosophy, up to the modern traditions of philosophical hermeneutics (Schleiermacher, Dilthey) and political anthropology (Max Scheler) where the term gets a more epistemological and phenomenological significance. As a term of political theory it may best be understood as emphasising the significance of the individual (against collectivism), though also emphasising the fundamental interrelatedness of the individual within its social and political context (against individualism). Without being able to go into this very intricate question, suffice here to state: Voegelin's approach of a "geisteswissenschaftliche Staatslehre" is methodically *personalistic*. The general orientation of Schmitt's analytical method, on the contrary, is as *collectivistic* as the formative ideas of the ongoing generative process of the new central European "type of mind" at the time.

This leads to the second, and even more fundamental aspect of Voegelin's critique which actually questions the theoretical status of Schmitt's thinking altogether.

²⁵ [25] Ebd., p. 106.

²⁶ [26] Ebd., pp. 96 ff. See also Voegelin, *National Types of Mind*, a.a.O., pp 402 f.

3. The position of the political thinker

For Voegelin the deeper reason for the collectivistic orientation and for the principally polemical mode of Schmitt's political thinking is that it primarily is a part of that central European generative process of a new set of political ideas.²⁷ [27] That means that Schmitt's conceptions are determined by the primarily evocative, politically functional mode of thinking and articulation that is characteristic for political ideas. Political theory, however, in its mode of thinking and articulation, is the exact opposite of a political idea: political theory is not evocative, but potentially critical, and it is not functional, but analytical.²⁸ [28] The one decisive characteristic of theory in Voegelin's early understanding is that it is not political, it is not part of the self-integrating and self-generating process of political communities as meaningful units. Schmitt's position as a political thinker therefore is a politically immanent position, while the theoretical political thinker for Voegelin has to take a transcendent position.²⁹ [29]

It may have to be emphasised here that the terms transcendent and immanent in this context do not denote a philosophical orientation towards the transcendent ground of being and the reductionist immanentization of transcendent reality in this sense, respectively (as one may expect with view to Voegelin's later writings). Here the terms are rather phenomenological or wissenssoziologische concepts and denote specific positions with respect to a particular sphere of human reality, viz. the sphere of political ideas and beliefs, understood as the sphere of the meaningful self-integration and socio-political self-generation of political communities as meaningful units. Thus, with respect to political reality itself

²⁷ [27] Voegelin, Die Verfassungslehre von Carl Schmitt, a.a.O., p. 107.

²⁸ [28] The term evocative is a later term that Voegelin does not yet use here. But the problem it describes the same immanent mode and function of political ideas, Voegelin points at in his Schmitt-essay at hand. For the term evocation as the counterpart of contemplation see Voegelin's early Introduction to the History of Political Ideas in: Voegelin, Collected Works, Vol. 19, pp. 225 ff.

²⁹ [29] Voegelin, Die Verfassungslehre von Carl Schmitt, a.a.O., p. 107.

political *theory* has to take a transcendent position, has to try to be located out of (or beyond) any politically functional, evocative context of any meaningful symbolico-political community-building or community-assertion.

In Schmitt's writings, as Voegelin demonstrates on the example of the *Verfassungslehre*, these fundamentally different modes of political thinking get mixed up. Schmitt's *Verfassungslehre* attempts to be a theoretical analysis of the Weimar Republic, while at the same time it is an enterprise in political evocation, in the creation of new political ideas.³⁰ [30] Schmitt's thinking therefore is an immanent thinking, it is itself political in this peculiar sense of the word. It is imbedded in and determined by the functional and evocative logic of political self-creation and self-assertion and therefore cannot be theoretical.

Thus, Voegelin's characterization of Schmitt's approach as an *immanent* one does not intend to deny a somewhat metaphysical dimension in Schmitt, this question is simply not at stake here. Actually, I think one could show that the issue of a substantial metaphysics interestingly is not primarily at stake in Schmitt's own conception of political theology either.³¹ [31] But I can only intimate this point here and state, without being able to elaborately demonstrate it in this short presentation, that the position of political theology in Schmitt can be understood as an explicitly immanent position in the Voegelinian sense outlined above, and thus as the exact counter-position of Voegelin's early transcendent political thinking. Voegelin's early political thinking cannot possibly be characterized as a political theology without misunderstanding this crucial aspect.

This final point best clarifies the general aspect regarding Voegelin's early reception of Schmitt I already emphasised in the beginning, an aspect that is very often missed in the literature. Although fundamentally critical, Voegelin's categories here (immanent versus transcendent)

³⁰ [30] Ebd., pp. 107 ff.

³¹ [31] This interpretation would be a principal argument against Heinrich Meier (and Leo Strauss) (see footnote No. 2). It rather follows the line of interpretation that already Karl Lwith has worked out in his early critique of Schmitt. See Karl Lwith, *Der okkasionelle Dezisionismus von Carl Schmitt*, 1935, in: ders., *Sämtliche Schriften*, Bd. 8, Stuttgart 1984.

are neither primarily categories of a critique of ideologies, nor do they aim at a critique of secularization or modernity in general. To understand these concepts this way (and to interpret Voegelin's Schmitt-reception under this emphasis) would mean to interpret the early Voegelin too much from the retrospective, from the later Voegelin, and therefore to miss the crucial points. Voegelin's reception *and* his critique of Schmitt in the early 1930s focusses on methodical, epistemological and theoretical issues. The crucial question is not yet that of the significance and the problem of modernity, but the question of the state, viz. the question: What is a political community? And the decisive opposition for the early Voegelin on which his critique of Schmitt is founded is not so much that between order and disorder, between philosophical knowledge and ideological deformation and the like, but that between *theory* and *the political* in the sense I just intimated. This significantly different emphasis is probably the most significant difference between Voegelin's geisteswissenschaftliche Staatslehre and his New Science of Politics.

I think, in order to fully grasp this issue and with it the significance of Carl Schmitt as a very interesting figure within Voegelin's early intellectual biography one would have to thoroughly analyse the meaning of Max Weber for both thinkers. I think that Voegelin and Schmitt in a way both had to face the same intellectual and existential challenge. They both (also the early Voegelin) had to deal with a theoretical problem inherited by the Weberian type of social and political science, and that is: the very lack of a scientifically or philosophically substantial critique of ideologies. And they had to deal with it in the historical situation of the crises of central Europe and of the rise of National Socialism. But as soon as this challenge clearly comes to the fore and with it the questions of modernity, secularization and religion and politics Voegelin and Schmitt at the latest went totally different ways and found totally different answers to this challenge, which in the end does not surprise, but can be understood to a great extent out of the fundamental differences of their respective political theories of which I tried to outline a few.

