The "chosen people" and the universal commonwealth:

from Bergson to Voegelin.

Popper ? « a troublesome pebble… »

Acknowledging the importance of Bergson's thought for him, Eric Voegelin wrote: « history of mankind […] is an open society– Bergson's, not Popper's–, comprehending both truth and untruth in tension »[1]. Two years later, explaining the In-Between structure of existence, the platonic *metaxy*, Voegelin alludes again to Bergson :

> "if anything is constant in […] history […] it is the language of tension between […] *amor Dei* and *amor sui, l'âme ouverte* et *l'âme close* ; between the virtues of openness toward the ground of being such as faith, love, and hope, and the vices of unfolding closure such as hybris and revolt…" [2].

No wonder then that, answering to Leo Strauss who asked him to confirm the bad opinion he already had concerning Popper's book, *The Open Society and Its Ennemies* (1945)[3], Eric Voegelin, complained that reading this book has stolen him many hours of his own work and replied:

> **"**This Popper has been for years […] a troublesome pebble that I must continually nudge from the path […] this book is impudent, dilettantish crash. Every single sentence is a scandal"[4].

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[1] E. Voegelin, Ingersoll Lecture, Harvard University School, "Immortality : Experience and Symbol" (1965): *Harvard Theological Review*, XL, July 1967: 239.

[2] E. Voegelin, " Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History" (1967), CW 12, *Published Essays* 1966-1985, ed. with an Introduction by Ellis Sandoz: Louisiana State University Press, 1990, 119-120.

[3] K. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 2 vol. , London, Routledge, 1945.

[4] E. Voegelin to Leo Strauss, April 18th 1950, *Faith and Political Philosophy* , The Correspondence betweeen E. Voegelin and Leo Strauss, 1934-1964: University of Missouri Press, 2004, 67-68. Notwithstanding Voegelin's warning concerning the

Voegelin criticizes Popper for having borrowed the expressions "closed" [society] and "open society" , as well as those of "static" and "dynamic religion", from Henri Bergson's *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932)[5] and to have made an "ideological rubbish" out of it[6]. Reviewing John Wild's *Plato's Modern Enemies and the Theory of Natural Law*[7], he alluded to

> " the bush war, if the metaphor be allowed, conducted during the last 25 years by ideologists in the English-speaking word against Plato [which] caricature Plato as a sort of fascist or generally totalitarian thinker",

and he regretted that both Wild and Ronald B. Levinson[8] didn't point in their books to Popper's misinterpretation who "perverted Bergson's

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privacy of his letter, Strauss showed it to his friend Kurz Riezler and used his influence so that Popper should not be elected « here », that is to say in Chicago.

[5] H. Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* , tr. By R. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Brereton, with the assistance of W. Horstfall Carter, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 1935/1963.

[6] E. Voegelin to L. Strauss, April 18th 1950, in *Faith and Political Philosophy*, The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin 1934-1964: University of Missouri Press, 2004: 67-68. Reviewing *Grundlinien der Antiken Rechts-und Staatsphilosophie* by Alfred Verdross-Drossberg (Alfred Verdross-Drossberg, *Grundlinien der Antiken Rechts-und Staatsphilosophie. Zweite erweiterte Auflage*, Vienne, Springer Verlag, 1948, in *Western Political Quarterly* 2 (1949), p. 437-38 / CW 13, *Selected books Reviews*, p. 179) Voegelin wrote : "Karl Popper's (*The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 1945) and John Wild's (*Plato's Theory of Man*, Chicago : Chicago University Press : 1953.1946) [which by the way L. Strauss also reviewed in 1946, "On a New Interpretation of Plato's Political Philosophy" in *Social Research* , XIII, 3, pp. 326-367], have received careful criticism. Moreover, the author now uses the categories of static and dynamic religion, developed by Bergson in his *Deux Sources de la morale et de la religion*, in order to arrive at a more precise characterization of Platonic ideas".

[7] John Wild, *Plato's Modern Enemies and the Theory of Natural Law* , Chicago: Chicago University Press: 1953,

[8] Ronald B. Levinson, *In defense of Plato* , Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1953.

concepts practically into the opposite of the meaning which they have in the *Deux sources de la morale et de la religion*"[9].

Popper himself, though acknowledging his debt to Bergson in a note of his Introduction, pointed to " the main difference " between them :

" My term [open society] indicates a *rationalist* distinction ; the closed society is characterized by the belief in magical taboos, while the open society is one in which men have learned to be to some extent critical of taboos, and to base decisions on the authority of their own intelligence (after discussion). Bergson, on the other hand, has a kind of *religious distinction* in mind."[10]

As Late Dante Germino has put it in *The Open Society in Theory and Practice*, a book dedicated to Eric Voegelin "who laid the foundation of an authentic philosophy of the open society":   "('Protagoras is the measure') is a hero to Popper, while Plato ('God is the measure') is a model for Bergson", that is to say that Popper expresses his idea of the open society primarily within the framework of secular liberalism, whereas Bergson emphasizes the opening of the psyche toward the ground of Being[11].

Bergson's own definitions in the Two Sources of Morality and Religion.

Let's now turn to Bergson's definitions. The hive and the ant-hill testify that social life is immanent to both animals and men. Like in the animal societies, human societies are " closed ", which means that men, moved by the *instinct*, are indifferent to each other, always ready to attack or defend themselves (*The Two Sources…*266). An *open society* is then a society "which is deemed in principle to embrace all

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[9] E. Voegelin, CW 13, *Selected books Reviews*, ed. and translated by Jodi Cockerill and Barry Cooper with an Introduction by Barry Cooper, University of Missouri Press, Columbia and London, 2001: 189.

[10] K. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* : London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1945: Preface, IX.

[11] D. Germino, *The Open Society in Theory and Practice*, edited by Dante Germino and Klaus von Beyme: The Hague : Martinus Nijhoff, 1974: 14.

humanity" (267) : we love spontaneously and directly our parents and fellow citizens, but love for humanity is indirect and acquired, and implies to make a detour since it is " only through God, in God, that religion bids man love mankind" (33). Therefore the difference between the city and humanity is a difference of *nature*, of *essence*, and not only of degree. By analogy, Bergson distinguishes between the "closed morality", that is to say the social morality which does not extend for all but only in the group, and the "open morality" he calls for and which embraces the whole humanity. This second morality is *human*, and here too the difference between the two is of nature and not only of degree : the social morality is unchanging, whereas the human morality consists in a *movement*, a detachement from well-being, wealth, riches, that is *ascetism*. Since time immemorial this morality has been incarnated in exceptionnal men who became examples: "Before the saints of Christianity, mankind had known the sages of Greece, the prophets of Israel, the Arahats of Buddhism, and others besides" (34).

   Translated in Voegelin's own vocabulary, what Bergson calls the "openness of the soul is the soul's rationality", opposed to "the self-closure of the soul against the ground, or the missing of the ground [which] is its irrationality"[12].

   Concerning religion, Bergson writes – " there has never been a society without religion" (102)–, the equivalent of the opposition between " closed" and " open" moralities, is paralleled by the difference between "static" and "dynamic religion". Bergson distinguishes two functions of religion : on the contrary to animals who do not know that they will die, the natural religion, or static religion, appears as a "*defensive reaction of nature against the representation, by intelligence, of the inevitability of death*" (**131**) through the promise of the continuation of life after death. Far from being a mere consolation binding man to life, and the individual to society " by telling him tales with those with which we lull children to sleep" (211), the dynamic religion is the *real mysticism* which, in some rare occasions is linked to the *élan vital.* It is:

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[12] E. Voegelin, CW 6, *Anamnesis*. On the Theory of History and Politics, "What is political Reality", ed. and Introduction by David Walsh & translated by M.J. Hanak: University of Missouri Press, Columbia and London, 2002: 347.

"the establishment of a contact, consequently on a partial coincidence, with the creative effort which life itself manifests. The great mystic is to be conceived as an individual being capable of transcending the limitations imposed on the species by its material nature, thus continuing and extending the divine action" (221-222)

In his essay " In Search of the Ground", E. Voegelin parallels Saint Augustine's *amor Dei* with Bergson's openness toward the ground of existence "because we all experience our own existence as not existing out of itself but as coming from somewhere even if we do not know from where", and in the discussion which followed, he quotes as documents of openness toward transcendence "the dialogues of Plato, the meditations of Saint Augustine on time and space, or the thorn-bush episode in Exodus"[13].

Bergson distinguishes then inside mysticism itself, between an *incomplete mysticism* and a complete mysticism. Neither in Greece nor in ancient India, however, Bergson suggests, is it possible to discover a *complete mysticism* : if, like Moses, Plotinus saw the promised land, he writes, nevertheless he could not enter it, since he thought *action* might weaken *contemplation*. The same holds true for Buddhism which is also an incomplete mysticism due to its lack of warmth and to its unbelief in the efficicacy of human action : for, only this trust in action "can grow to power and move mountains" (225). As a matter of fact, the examples of great mystics chosen by Bergson are all Catholic : Saint Paul, Saint Theresa, Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Francis, and Saint Joan of Arc, who, through their love for God loved the whole humanity of a divine love and set an example for " a radical transformation of humanity"(239). In brief, as Bergson puts it, " religion is to mysticism what popularization is to science" (253) : mysticism is the inner religion of mankind, opposed to the social bound conceived as solely solidarity of the closed group.

In a letter to his Viennese friend Gregor Sebba, Eric Voegelin admitted he could not deny being himself a mystic insofar as the tension toward the transcendent ground of being has been the motor of

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[13] E. Voegelin, CW 11, *Published Essays 1953-1965*, edited with an introduction of Ellis Sandoz « In Search of the Ground »: University of Missouri Press, Columbia and London: 241-242.

his life-long struggle against all sorts of modern ideologies[14]. We may however wonder here:

1) if what Voegelin calls *compact* opposed to *differentiated* experience of the divine, corresponds to Bergson's categories.

2) whether this radical transformation of humanity through action which Bergson calls for, does not correspond to what Voegelin usually condemns under the name of *metastasis*, in other words, if there is not a tendency to "immanentize the eschaton" in Bergson? But, as Pf. D. Germino has convincingly noted, this is not the case since the worldwide open society, which Voegelin espouses, is not to be achieved through violence and revolution but will be a gradual process taking centuries[15].

From static to dynamic mysticism.

How does humanity achieve the transition between static and dynamic religion, that is to say from natural religion to complete mysticism may we ask ? This transition occurs all of a sudden, unexpectedly in the soul– be it the soul of a mystic philosopher or a prophet–, by coming into contact with the *élan vital*, the "principle of life". This suddenness may be compared, as Late Professor Dante Germino again, wisely suggested it[16], to what Voegelin calls for his

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[14] E. Voegelin to Gregor Sebba, February 3rd, 1973, in CW 30, Selected Correspondence 1950-1984, trans. Sandy Adler, Thomas A. Hollweck, & William Petropulos, ed. and intro. Thomas A. Hollweck: University of Missouri Press, Columbia and London, 2007: 751.

[15] D. Germino *Political Philosophy and the Open Society* : Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge and London, 1982: 166: "Bergson is saved by his gentleness and spiritual sensitivity from embracing any revolutionary creed promising a magical *metastasis* of existence through some epoch-making act of revolution. The achievement of the worldwide open society within the stream of becoming would, he thought, be the result of a gradual process possibly taking centuries and completely forswearing violence as a means of its realization".

[16] Dante Germino, *The Open Society in Theory and Practice* , edited by Dante Germino and Klaus von Beyme: The Hague : Martinus Nijhoff , 1974: 147.

part the *leap in being*, that is the discovery of the transcendent being
to the world as the source of the order in man and society :

" The leap in being, the epochal event that breaks the compactness of the early
cosmological myth and establishes the order of man in his immediacy under God
[…] occurs twice in the history of mankind, at roughly the same time, in the
Near Eastern and the neighboring Aegean civilizations. The two occurrences,
while they run parallel in time and have in common their opposition to the Myth,
are independent of each other ; and the two experiences differ so profoundly in
content that they become articulate in the two different symbolisms of
Revelation and Philosophy. Moreover, comparable breaks with the myth, again
of widely different complexions, occur contemporaneously in the India of
Buddha and the China of Confucius and Laotse"[17].

According to Voegelin's terminology, the transition achieved by
the leap in Being is the transition from a *compact* to a *differentiated*
experience of the divine. What Bergson describes as a "progress",
corresponds to what Voegelin prefers to call "differentiation", that is
to say a difference in degree and not in essence, a more "advanced"
level of understanding. This is why, whereas Bergson dismisses
mythology, Voegelin takes it into account: the cosmological societies
are no less "rational" as the more differentiated ones, only their
symbols have become "opaque" to us, and we must therefore restore
their "luminosity" by getting back to the root experiences behind the
symbols.

Supplanting the Egyptian cosmic-divine order, Israel offered a new
conception of history, introducing a "before" and an "after" into time,
and this inaugurating *History* proper : " Without Israel there would be
no history, but only the eternal recurrence of societies in cosmological
form"[18]. It does not mean of course that Egypt and Babylon have no
history, but this history cannot articulate itself in their *compact*
symbolism : *historical* for Voegelin means to be bound to the

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[17] E. Voegelin, CW 15, *OH*II, *The World of the Polis* , ed. with an Introduction by
Athanasios Moulakis: University of Missouri Press, Columbia and London, 2000:
67 and 69.

[18] E. Voegelin, CW 14,   *OH*1, *Israel and Revelation* , ed. with an Introduction by
Maurice P. Hogan: University of Missouri Press, Columbia and London, 1001:168.

differentiated transcendent Being. The *differentiation* achieved by Israel consists in that, for the first time, the order of the soul and the order of society orientated themselves according to obedience or defection to God's will, as revealed to Moses at the thorn-bush, and to the people gathered at Mount Sinai. Accepting the Decalogue, contracting the Alliance with the God transcendent to the world, Israel consented thus to constitute himself as *goy qadosh* (Ex. 19, 6), a holy nation, under God, that is to say as the "chosen people" : "*You only have I known of all the families of the earth…*"[19]. God declares, thereby setting off a new community from the rest of mankind[20]. But here it seems that Bergson as well as Voegelin neglect to mention the second verse of Amos: 'therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities' whereby God underlines the responsibility of the chosen people regarding the rest of the world.

Judaism and Christianity : national religion versus universal religion ?

Although coming from a Jewish family, Henri Bergson desired to convert himself to Christianity. Nonetheless, sensing what was going to happen to the Jews, he explained in his will that he finally didn't take the decisive step to baptism, not willing to separate himself from those who were to become persecuted by the Nazi regime[21]. In *The Two Sources*, Bergson, interpreting the Sermon on the Mount – " *Ye have heard that… But I say onto you*"–, in terms of the opposition between the "closed" and the " open", claims the superiority of Christianity : " The morality of the Gospels is essentially that of the open soul" (59). If Bergson hesitates to "class the Jewish prophets among the mystics of antiquity", it is because, as he observes, "Yaweh is too stern a judge, [and because] Israel and its God were not close enough together for Judaism to be the mysticism which we are defining" (240), he writes. The sole exception which Bergson consents among the prophets, is in favor of Isaiah[22] : " If any of them, like Isaiah, may have thought of

[19] Amos, 3, 2. King James version.

[20] E. Voegelin, CW 14, *OH*1: 207.

[21] Contrary to what Raïssa Maritain pretends,, see http://www.biblisem.net/etudes/mariberg.htm. His daughter, Jeanne, will take the step.

[22] Isaiah, 11, 10 : *And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people ; to it shall the Gentiles seek : and his rest shall be glorious*.

universal justice, it was because Israel, the chosen of God among the other peoples, bound to God by a covenant, was so high above the rest of mankind that sooner or later it was destined to be taken as a model"(76). If he does not deny that the prophets achieved the first progress against mythology, Christ is for him the " second name" of the second progress, that is to say that Christianity achieved the transition from the " close" to the " open" : "There seems to be no doubt that this second advance, the passage from the closed to the open, is due to Christianity, as the first was due to the Prophets of Judaism" (77).

No argument can be found in Bergson's quotation : the superiority of Christianity is simply self-evident to him. What did Bergson regard as so problematic about Judaism and the prophets ? If he concedes that they fought against injustice, he nonetheless adds : "The justice they preached applied above all to Israel, their indignation against injustice was the very wrath of Jehovah against His disobedient people, or against the enemies of this chosen people" (76). Although just and powerful, the God of Israel appears to him, as already said, too "stern a judge", lacking of "intimacy" with his people, but above all the reproach consists here, as a footnote indicates, in the " national character of the God of Israel", whereas Christianity brought the idea of a " universal brotherhood". The progress then consisted in the substitution of a national religion:

" a religion which was still essentially national was replaced by a religion that could be made universal. A God who was doubtless a contrast to all other gods by His justice as well by His power, but Whose power was used for His people, and Whose justice was applied, above all, to His own subjects, was succeeded by a God of love, a God Who loved all mankind"(240).

In the anti-Semitic University of Vienna, a rumor spread around Voegelin being Jewish, just because he studied with Hans Kelsen, or because of the hostility he expressed against national-socialism since 1933 in his previous books. In spite of his assertion that he was either Jewish, nor communist, nor Christian, and in spite of the fact that though born a Lutheran he didn't care too much about going to Church,

Vogelin flew Austria " as if he was a Jewish"[23], which Ernst Bloch's wife could not understand[24]. He objected as well to being regarded a "traveler fellow" of Catholicism, under the pretext that he knew "such abominations as Aristotle and Saint Thomas"[25], or because the last word in *Israel and Revelation* is Jesus, and as he made clear to Alfred Schütz :

"Essentially my concern with Christianity has no religious grounds at all. It is simply that the traditional treatment of the history of philosophy and particularly of political ideas recognizes antiquity and modernity, while the 1500 years of Christian thought and Christian politics are treated as a kind of hole in the evolution of mankind[…]Whatever one may think of Christianity, it cannot be treated as negligible. A general history of ideas must be capable of treating the phenomenon of Christianity with no less theoretical care than that devoted to Plato or Hegel[…]. There are degrees in the differentiation of experiences […] Now with Christianity a decisive differentiation has occurred, one which can perhaps be elucidated in the Platonic parable of the cave"[26].

If Voegelin really thinks that all symbolizations of the divine reality are "equivalent", or rather differ only in the degree of differentiation, he nonetheless seems to take literally the words of Jesus: "*Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets : I am not come to destroy,*

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[23] This is how Reinhold Knoll characterizes Voegelin's flight when the Germans entered Vienna, Barry Cooper et Jodi Bruhn, *Voegelin Recollected, Conversations on a Life*, University of Missouri Press, 2008 : 232.

[24] E. Voegelin **,** CW 34, *Autobiographical Reflections* , Revised edition with a Voegelinian Glossary and Cumulative Index, ed. with Introductions by Ellis Sandoz, University of Missouri Press, 2006, 72.

[25] E. Voegelin, to Eduard Baumgarten July 10th 1951, CW 30, *Selected Correspondence 1950-1984.* Translations from the German by Sandy Adler, Thomas A. Hollweck and William Petropoulos. Edited with an Introduction by Thomas A. Hollweck: University of Missouri Press, Columbia and London, 2007:98. See also his letter to John East, July 18th 1977, *ibid.* : 825 : "When somebody wants me to be a Catholic or a Protestant, I tell him that I am a pre-Reformation Christian'. If he wants to nail me down as a Thomist or Augustinian, I tell him that even Mary the Virgin was not a member of the Catholic Church".

[26] E.   Voegelin, Letter to Alfred Schütz, January 1, 1953, CW 30, *Selected Correspondence…*: 122-123.

*but to **fulfill***[27]. Now, it is precisely this fulfillment, this perfecting, which Bergson considers as the "superiority" of Jesus, the first mystic according to him. Let us listen to a Jewish voice, Emmanuel Levinas mocking at what he calls the "workers of the eleventh hour":

"Christian theologians have presented themselves as the men who perfected, carried out and rounded off Judaism, like those Kantians who, in their studies, perfect Kant and those Platonists who improve Plato[…]Our feeling for Christianity is wholehearted, but it remains one of friendship and fraternity. It cannot become paternal. We cannot recognize a child that is not ours. We protest against its claim on the inheritance and its impatience to take over, since we are still alive and kicking"[28].

Voegelin rejected the convention in accordance with which the history of ideas began only with classic Greek philosophy, and that is the reason why he wrote the first volume of *Order and History*, *Israel and Revelation*. While its status as God's chosen people, Israel did not renounce worldly existence, which is to say to become a nation " like all the other nations" under a king : " the leap upward in being is not a leap out of existence"[29]. From this moment onwards, conflicts arose between temporal order and divine order, which Voegelin interprets as *derailments* able to bring back Israel in the *Sheol* of the cosmological civilizations, that is to say in terms of " a fall from Being". Confronted with *disorder* – injustices, foreign policy, social evils–, the prophets called for a spiritual renewal of the people by reminding it that Israel's order had its origin in Moses and the Sinai Alliance. But the people seemed deaf, and " the prophets were torn by the conflict between spiritual universalism and patriotic parochialism that had been from the beginning in the conception of a chosen people"[30].

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[27] King James, Matthew, Chapter 5, 17. Which Voegelin prefers to render as : "Do not imagine that I have come to destroy the Law and the Prophets. I have come not to destroy them, but to bring them to their full meaning" (*OH* I, *IR*, 390, see footnote 17).

[28] E. Levinas, "The Case Spinoza", *Difficult Freedom*, tr. By Sean Hand, The John Hopkin Press: Baltimore: 109.

[29] E. Voegelin, CW 14, *OH*I: 49.

[30] E. Voegelin, CW 14, OHI: 407.

Blaming Israel for not having been quite able to " separate the Kingdom of God from Canaan"[31], among all the Jewish prophets, the one which seems to have Voegelin's favor is not Isaiah[32], but Jeremy, the one in which "the holy *omphalos* of history had contracted from the chosen People into his personal existence"[33]. Voegelin credits him for having a glimpse "of the terrible truth : that the existence of a concrete society in a definite form will not resolve the problem of order in history, that no chosen People in any form will be the ultimate *omphalos* of the true order of mankind"[34].

In *Race and State* he demonstrates how the Jewish idea of election– which is such that there cannot be two chosen peoples – an idea which the Nazis took over from the Jews and made central to their self-understanding -- has been at the root of the Jewish- hatred that has long pervaded German history:

" the proclamation of the experience of one's chosenness seems to me the deepest reason for the hatred of Jewish throughout history […]In the German history of anti-Semitism the more or less emphasis of Jewish chosenness and superiority serves as constant ferment for an atmosphere of hate…"[35].

Transposed from the religions into the political sphere, the idea of a chosen People might lead to the first misconstrual of the purpose of political institutions which he denounces: the " tension toward God gets transformed into the idea of a human society in which the chosen are assigned a function of leadership" [36]. Despite the destruction of this political organization through the ecumenical empires, the idea of

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[31] E. Voegelin, CW 14, OHI: 208.

[32] He even interprets two of his prophecies, respectively to the kings Achaz and Ézéchias (Is., 7, 4-9 and 30-31) as *metastatic faith*, making him the first gnostic, that is the first ideologist.

[33] E. Voegelin, *OH* I, 520.

[34] E. Voegelin, *OH* I, 545.

[35] E. Voegelin, CW 2, *Race and State*, ed. by Klaus Vondung, transl. by Ruth Hein: Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, 1997: 185.

[36] E. Voegelin, CW 33, *The Drama of Humanity and Other Miscellaneous Papers , 1939-1985*, ed. with an Introduction by William Petropoulos and Gilbert Weiss, University of Missouri Press, Columbia and London, 2004: 150.

chosenness still dominates the political scene "in which more than one people feels itself chosen to enter into leadership of world society"[37].

  Does this critique of Israel's understanding of its chosenness entail that Voegelin, like Bergson, regards Christianity as superior to Judaism? As though he were addressing this very question, Voegelin speaks to the limitations of Israelite self-understanding, observing that :

  " Under Israelite historical conditions, no institutional solution could be found that would have been comparable to the Christian development of the spiritual and temporal orders. For within the history of Israel proper the idea of the theopolity did not bring forth its fruit, the idea of mankind as a universal church […] The compact symbol of the chosen People could never be completely broken by the idea of a universal God and a universal mankind"[38].

Moreover, in apparent agreement with Bergson, Voegelin articulates an understanding of the Christian idea of community in terms that seem to imply a critical view of the limits of the Israelite self-understanding of the theo-political community:

" In the Christian idea of the community the bond between the members is created […] through the participation of every person in the *pneuma* of Christ. The unifying force is the transcendental divine personality of Christ, and the community might be called 'open' because it is not a closed mundane entity but an aggregate of persons finding its common center in a substance beyond the field of earthly experience. By 'closing' of a substance I mean the process in the course of which the transcendental point of union is abolished and the community substance as an intramundane entity becomes self-centered" [39].

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[37] E. Voegelin, « Man in Society and History », CW 11, *Published Essays*, 1953-1965, ed. with an Introduction by Ellis Sandoz: University of Missouri Press, Columbia et Londres, 2000: 204.

[38] E. Voegelin, *OH* I, 294-295.

[39] E. Voegelin, "The growth of race idea" , CW 10, *Published Essays* 1940-1952, ed. with an Introduction by Ellis Sandoz, University of Missouri Press, 2000: 46.

In sharp contrast to Bergson and Voegelin, however, who cannot help but regard Judaism comparatively, with one eye trained upon Christianity, a comparison in which Israel is found wanting, Levinas insists that "Israel is not defined by opposition to Christianity," or by opposition to any other religion, and that, viewed on its own terms, its essence consists "in promoting understanding between all men who are tied to morality. Moreover, it seeks their understanding, in the first instance, with Christians and Muslims, who are its neighbors or companions in civilization. But the base of this civilization – that is, of the mutual understanding for which Israel strives, is Levinas insists– the Reason that the Greek philosophers revealed to the world"[40]. Further, Levinas recalls that far from contradicting the idea of universality, the idea of chosen people "is in reality the founding of tolerance [and that]the sense of being chosen expresses less the pride of someone who has been called than the humility of someone who serves. Being chosen is no more appalling as a condition than being the place for all moral consciousness. Better than doctrinal unanimity, it guarantees peace. It is the arrogance of a gratuitous duty that scorns reciprocity"[41].

Democracy and open society.

How, asks Bergson, are we supposed to overcome the tendency to form closed society, the tendency which leads to war, which seems inextinguishable? Bergson's answer is to espouse a complete mysticism, by which he means a mysticism centered around action and not only contemplative –as in Plato–, that would aim to transform humanity within time and the world. And yet, as he observes, true mysticism is very seldom: "How [he asks] could it spread in a humanity obsessed by the fear of hunger?" As to the type of government which would be most suitable for an open society, he favors democracy,

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[40] E. Levinas, "The Spinoza Case"*, Difficult Freedom. Essays on Judaism*, tr. By Sean Hand: The John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore: 109.

[41] E. Levinas, "Religion and Tolerance", *Difficult Freedom. Essays on Judaism* , tr. By Sean Hand: The John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore 174.

which appeared rather late in history, while regarding the democracies of the ancient world, which were based on slavery, as but false democracies. In contrast to monarchy and oligarchy, democracy is indeed the farthest regime from the state of nature, and the only one whose intentions transcend the "closed society". Granting man inviolable rights, requiring loyalty to the duties, democracy proclaims equality, freedom and brotherhood : in brief, "democracy is evangelical in essence" (282), proclaims Bergson, quoting Rousseau and Kant as his forerunners. Modernity is characterized by its craving for progress and, as a consequence, men developed industrialization and mechanization which increase consumerism. Nowadays this modernity has revealed without restraint –well being and luxury for the few, instead of liberation for everybody. Even if it is true that mysticism is asceticism, it cannot spread "in a humanity obsessed by the fear of hunger": therefore, paradoxically, in order to get away from matter, man must nonetheless use its tools as a support, "which amounts to say that mystical summons up the mechanical" (309). But vice versa in this "body distended out of all proportion, the soul remains what it was, too small to fill it, too weak to guide it", and needs a supplement, so that "mechanism should mean mysticism" (310). What we are then looking for, is the call of the "hero": even if only a few of us will follow him, he will show us the way not only merely to live, but to "make just the extra effort required for fulfilling, even on our refractory planet, the essential function of the universe, which is a machine for the making of gods" (317). But is Bergson's Christian inspiration of the democracy still valid in our time of secularization and pluralistic culture may we ask?

Although less lyrical than Bergson, E. Voegelin too reminds us nevertheless of the evangelical source of democracy. In the *Gettysburg Address* which US President Abraham Lincoln delivered on November 1863 during the Civil American War, democracy was defined as "the government of the people, for the people and by the people". In the Prologue to the translation of the Bible by Wycliffe in 1834, we read: " 'This Bible is for the government of the people, by the people, for the people'[…] The people that can govern by itself and for itself is not any people in an ethnic sense, not any people regardless of its cultural maturity (*Kulturstand*). It is the people that experienced its birth under God, that can also lose its life in this status, and that […] necessitates a

rebirth to be able to govern"[42]. Voegelin then observes that although the English reformers of the fourteenth to the eighteenth century were Christians, "their political dream as inspired by their study of the Bible, was the theopolity of Israel: the idea of God's chosen people and its rulers under God and His Law". Due to their project to make the legislation of Moses the civil law of England, instead of the common law, and to the emigration of Puritan communities to America where they organized themselves as God's people in the new Canaan, the Anglo-Saxon tradition called this enterprise that of "the dreamers (*Traümer*) in Israel"[43].

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[42] E. Voegelin, "Democracy and the New Europe", CW 11, *Published Essays* 1953-1965, ed. with an Introduction by Ellis Sandoz: University of Missouri Press, Columbia and London, 2000: 61. See also Voegelin's important letter to Carl Joachim Friedrich date April 12, 1959, CW 30, *Selected Correspondence…*: 388.

[43] E. Voegelin, CW 11, "Democracy and the New Europe", *Published Essays* 1953-1965, ed. with an Introduction by Ellis Sandoz: University of Missouri Press, Columbia and London, 2000: 62.