Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin

on

Humanism and Human Science

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Writing both from academic positions in American departments of political science in the 1950s, the German refugee scholars Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin described the aspirations of their own field of study in similar ways. Wrote Strauss, philosophy, "as quest for wisdom, is quest for universal knowledge, for knowledge of the whole…. Instead of 'the whole' the philosophers also say 'all things'…. Quest for knowledge of 'all things' means quest for knowledge of God, the world, and man—or rather quest for knowledge of the natures of all things: the natures in their totality are 'the whole.'"[1] Voegelin likewise introduces his magnum opus, *Order and History*, with the sentence, "God and man, world and society form a primordial community of being." Voegelin prefaces his study by describing it as an exercise in science, rather than philosophy, but he seems clearly to be using the term "science" in its broadest sense as knowledge, in German, *Wissenschaft*, for immediately after introducing his "quaternarian structure" he explains that it is "knowable only from the perspective of participation in it."[2] These were not men who confined political science to the study of election data and state spending. Instead they found in the study of politics and political order a window on the study of all things.

Today we would probably describe scholars of such wide-ranging interests as "humanists" and would expect to find them, if at all, in divisions of the university known as the "humanities." Both Strauss and Voegelin knew these terms, but both

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[1] Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988; orig. 1959), p. 11.
[2] Voegelin, *Israel and Revelation: Order and History I*, in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 14

[2] Voegelin, *Israel and Revelation: Order and History I*, in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 14
ed. Maurice Hogan (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), p. 39.

would have rejected the label. Why this is so, and what it means for their embrace of political science and for their similarities and differences with one another, are the questions that I address in this essay.

STRAUSS ON SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANISM

Strauss's essay, "Social Science and Humanism," became more widely known when published as the first chapter of Thomas Pangle's collection of essays and lectures by Strauss, *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, in 1989, but it first appeared in a collection of talks at a conference at the University of Chicago.[3] Announced as marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Social Sciences Research Building at the University, the intention was not merely to mark the virtue of the stone and mortar, but to assess "The State of the Social Sciences" in the University and by implication in America and even in the world at large, for Chicago considered itself to be—and in the eyes of many then was—on the cutting edge of social science research. On the program of the conference were such luminaries as Herbert Simon, Harold Lasswell, George Stigler, Frank Knight, Bernard Berelson, Hans Morgenthau, F.A. Hayek, and Walter Lippmann. Strauss's session was chaired by a professor of Egyptology, he shared speaking duties with a professor of medieval history, and his discussants were a Newberry Librarian and a member of the Académie Française.

Strauss's essay has two main parts, with a third, central part that really forms the heart of what he has to say. The first part is a meditation on the relation of the

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[3] Strauss, "Social Science and Humanism," in Leonard D. White, ed., *The State of the Social Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), pp. 415-425, reprinted in Thomas L. Pangle, ed., *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 3-12. Subsequent citation to the essay will be from Pangle's edition. The conference program is an appendix in *The State of the Social Sciences*, pp. 475-480.

social sciences to the humanities; the third part is a critique of what Strauss here calls "extreme humanism"; the central part discusses divinity. Strauss opens by asserting that humanism is distinguished from science on the one hand and from the civic art on the other, then suggesting that the social sciences emerge where humanism, science, and the civic art converge. Sensible as this may sound, Struass shows it to be immediately problematic, since "only science and humanism can be said to be at home in academic life," and like many who share a home, they are at odds, despising or ignoring one another. The source of their conflict was nicely captured in the seventeenth century by Blaise Pascal, who distinguished the *esprit de géometrie* from the *esprit de finesse*—the scientific spirit "characterized by detachment and by the forcefulness which stems from simplicity or simplification" from the humanistic spirit "characterized by attachment or love and by breadth." The former is at odds with common sense, Strauss writes, the latter hides within it.[4] A few years later, in his essay, "What Is Political Philosophy?," he will similarly distinguish what he calls knowledge of homogeneity from knowledge of heterogeneity, relating them to "two opposite charms: the charm of competence which is engendered by mathematics and everything akin to mathematics, and the charm of humble awe, which is engendered by meditation on the human soul and its experiences."[5] Then he will conclude, "Philosophy is characterized by the gentle, if firm, refusal to succumb to either charm." In "Social Science and Humanism," though the distinction seems the same, the emphasis in the passage is on the "severe limitations" of the scientific spirit in understanding human things, limitations that

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[4] "Social Science and Humanism," pp. 3-4.
[5] *What Is Political Philosophy*, p. 40.

stem from specialization, from the development of an abstract language, and from the sharp distinction between values and facts and the concern of science only with the latter. The humanistic spirit, it seems, has a better claim to understand human beings, since it grasps things in their wholeness and knows what it is to love.

But this is not what Strauss says, at least not right away. Rather, he contrasts the scientific attitude of the social scientist with the perspective of the citizen, whose spirit is apparently not refined in either way but is simply characterized by common sense. What the citizen wants is not social science "concerned with regularities of behavior," but simply "good government," which he does not hesitate to value. To counteract what Strauss now calls "the dangers inherent in specialization" he summons "a conscious return to commonsense thinking," by which he means a return to the "perspective of the citizen," and this in turn means not simply to votes but to the "understand[ing of] social reality as it is understood in social life by thoughtful and broadminded men." "In other words, the true matrix of social science is the civic art and not a general notion of science or scientific method." If social science is unwilling to become a "mere handmaid" of the civic art, it must nevertheless take its bearings by the citizen's perspective implicit in the civic art, not accidentally, in selling its neutral services to the highest bidder or in contributing them to its favorite party, but essentially, in speaking the language of liberal democracy and in counseling it as a wise friend: a social science "ruled by the legitimate queen of the social sciences—the pursuit traditionally known by the name of ethics." "This, or something like this, is, I believe, what many people have in

mind when speaking of a humanistic approach, as distinguished from the scientistic approach, to social phenomena."[6]

As is apparent, Strauss does not call such an approach "humanistic" in his own name, but rather "civic," a term which carefully dodges the question of whether political science, which after all for Aristotle encompassed the pursuit he called ethics, is the queen of the social sciences, or as Aristotle also wrote, "architectonic." Strauss does note on behalf of the term humanistic that it registers that "social science is always a kind of self-knowledge," since social scientists are themselves human beings studying human societies. The reason, I think, that he does not adopt this term is because it has been corrupted by a trend in humanistic study of human things that he calls an "extreme version" in contrast to the "moderate" humanism defined by the civic art, a corruption he discusses in the final part of his essay. He mentions no names or even disciplines, but I think he has in mind what comes to be called cultural anthropology.[7] Eschewing imitation of the natural sciences which deal properly with "the study of phenomena to which we have access only by observing them from without and in detachment," the radically humanistic social scientist "relives or re-enacts the life of the human beings whom he studies or… enters into the perspective of the actors and understands the life of the actors from

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[6] "Social Science and Humanism," pp. 5-6.

[7] See, for example, Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), especially its first chapter, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," and the influential article reprinted as its last chapter, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." Sure enough, Geertz began his professorial career at the University of Chicago, though when Strauss wrote he was working on his Ph.D. at Harvard with Talcott Parsons; I take it Strauss could anticipate the logic of the position without having to have read what would become its *locus classicus*. Perhaps the term "histrionic" came to Strauss's attention in an essay that appeared earlier the same year of the conference in a journal published by the University of Chicago that begins with a criticism of Strauss's critique of relativism in *Natural Right and History*: John W. Yolton, "Criticism and Histrionic Understanding," *Ethics* 65 (1955): 206-212.

their own point of view." Although sharing in lives from within "means sharing in the acceptance of the values which are accepted by the societies or the individuals whom one studies, or accepting these values 'histrionically' as the true values," the social scientist escapes the moral nihilism of the old relativism that looked at cultures from the outside and anchored them in the cultures' historical situations, because, as a valuing human being himself, he cannot help judging the values he imaginatively embraces, even if in the end that judgment "cannot be traced beyond our decision or commitment." But precisely if this is so, argues Strauss, sympathetic understanding is merely "histrionic," not "serious and genuine," unless it is gripped with the claim of the values of the society under study to be true. The new relativism, like the old, undercuts itself: "What claims to be the final triumph over provincialism [i.e., sympathetic understanding] reveals itself as the most amazing manifestation of provincialism [i.e., of the self-congratulatory relativistic social scientists]."[8] Or else, I suppose, the social scientist converts.

Strauss, then, endorses the value of a humanistic understanding of social life insofar as it is guided by the civic art, but he warns against the tendency of humanistic social science to issue in nihilism or existentialism—or as he explains in other essays, to issue in radical historicism. Can this mean that there is no adequate academic study of the human things, in his view, besides Queen Ethics? He hints at his answer in the brief middle section of his essay, introduced by a seeming aside:

> There is, finally, another implication of the term "humanism"—viz., the contradistinction of human studies to divinity. Provisionally, I limit myself to

[8] "Social Science and Humanism," pp. 8-9, 12.

> the remark that humanism may be said to imply that the moral principles are more knowable to man, or less controversial among earnest men, than theological principles.[9]

Reflecting on what it means to be human teaches one to be humane: "One is tempted to say that to be inhuman is the same as to be unteachable, to be unable or unwilling to listen to other human beings." Still, ethics, which I presume includes the science of moral principles, is only provisional, Strauss suggests; a fully adequate academic study of the human things cannot rest content with ethics alone but must raise the question of divinity. Strauss makes this plain in the remarkable paragraph that follows, which I quote in full:

> Yet, even if all were said that could be said and that cannot be said, humanism is not enough. Man, while being at least potentially a whole, is only a part of a larger whole. While forming a kind of world and even being a kind of world, man is only a little world, a microcosm. The macrocosm, the larger whole to which man belongs, is not human. That whole, or its origin, is either subhuman or superhuman. Man cannot be understood in his own light but only in the light of either the subhuman or the superhuman. Either man is an accidental product of a blind evolution or else the process leading to man, culminating in man, is directed toward man. Mere humanism avoids this ultimate issue. The human meaning of what we have come to call "Science" consists precisely in this—that the human or the higher is understood in the light of the subhuman or the lower. Mere humanism is

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[9] *Ibid*., p. 7; see also *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 164.

> powerless to withstand the onslaught of modern science. It is from this point of view that we can begin to understand again the original meaning of science, of which the contemporary meaning is only a modification: science as man's attempt to understand the whole to which he belongs. Social science, as the study of things human, cannot be based on modern science, although it may judiciously use, in a strictly subordinate fashion, both methods and results of modern science. Social science must rather be taken to contribute to the true universal science into which modern science will have to be integrated eventually.[10]

This is a rich text, but for the purposes of this paper let me make just four comments upon it. First, it seems to me decisive in its rejection of the adequacy of "mere humanism." This is significant, not least because much of the secondary commentary on Strauss, especially by his admirers, not to mention his detractors, supposes that he is an atheist whose interest in theology is confined to its usefulness as political rhetoric, a humanistic usage, one might concede.[11] Although admittedly it is difficult sometimes to distinguish when Strauss is speaking in his own name as opposed to paraphrasing an author on whom he is commenting, and admittedly it is possible that Strauss, whose interpretive eye is famously alert to esoteric writing, might himself sometimes write esoterically, I do not find either a likely explanation for this paragraph. He is not writing as a commentator in this essay but very much in his own persona, speaking as a representative of his discipline at an

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[10] "Social Science and Humanism," pp. 7-8.

[11] See, for example, Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), an admirer, and Shadia Drury, *The Political Ideas of Leo Strauss* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), a detractor.

interdisciplinary conference at his own university. As for the indicia of esotericism, they operate here in reverse: As Strauss notes, he is the one who introduces divinity, since "our program" [i.e., the conference program?] is otherwise silent about it, and the remarks come in the middle of the essay, precisely where Strauss says the author writing esoterically puts things he wants to highlight, not things he wants to hide. Strauss was speaking to atheists or to agnostics or at the very least to an audience that did not think their personal opinions about divinity has any import for their social science; why would he choose to pick a fight?

The second thing to notice is the importance he places on nature and natural science. Although Strauss makes clear in the passage that he thinks that an explanation of human things in light of the subhuman is inadequate—breaking clearly with the dominant Darwinism of the academy in his age as still in ours—he nevertheless insists that this issue be faced and that the dominant power of science in modern society be acknowledged. Perhaps his concern is only with the distortion to the larger vision of science that results from the prestige of modern natural science; that alone is no small thing, not least when its method becomes the coin of all learning, something Strauss clearly rejects in itself. Perhaps, too, his concern is political, if the prestige of the natural sciences and the technologies they foster confuse or diminish the common sense of ordinary citizens, something Strauss knows to be imperfect but nonetheless thinks worth preserving, both for the political good they actively seek and for the natural beginning point of philosophy they incidentally supply.

The third point is to notice that Strauss here reiterates what he suggested earlier in the essay, that natural-scientific methods in the social sciences—perhaps he means the use of statistics and maybe even experiments—must be "strictly subordinate" to philosophic thought. Already in his day he knew this was a wish and not a command, at least not in most major universities; today the sentence prompts a guffaw, so implausible it is in most departments even at undergraduate colleges. Nevertheless, by repeating it Strauss indicates his seriousness about the issue, at least as a matter of principle. That he can wait for its fulfillment is indicated by the fourth and final point I wish to highlight, his hope that modern natural science will sooner or later have to be reintegrated into philosophy as a whole. Strauss elsewhere writes that the understanding of modern science what would permit the restoration of the Aristotelian wholeness of learning, so to speak, is not available, but apparently that does not mean he does not think it intellectually imperative.[12] That he describes his project as "Platonic political philosophy" does not mean that a genuine neo-Aristotelian philosophy that incorporates modern scientific discoveries is undesirable should it become available. It did no dishonor to Plato in the medieval world that he was known as Aristotle's teacher, even if the latter was seen to be the more complete philosopher, as it did no dishonor to Socrates that Plato published more than he.

VOEGELIN ON HUMAN SCIENCE AND HUMANISM

In about 1932, Eric Voegelin prepared a prospectus in German for a book he seems never to have written, tentatively titled "Staatslehre als Geisteswissenschaft."

[12] See the comment on Aristotelian and Thomistic physics in *What Is Political Philosophy?*, p. 286.

Found in his papers, translated into English as "Political Theory as Human Science," and published I believe for the first time in Voegelin's *Collected Works*, the short document proposes grounding political science in a "human science approach," which I trust could also be translated as "spiritual science," given the pregnant meaning of the term "Geist" or "spirit" in the original German. Voegelin means to analyze

> The reality of the state as it is given in the perspectives of the persons reciprocally involved in the acts that constitute the life of the state: the judge viewed by the legal theoretician, the legal order viewed by the judge or the criminal, the electorate viewed from the standpoint of the constitution, the parties seen by the electorate, the citizens as the object of political theory, the justifications of the structure of domination as it is experienced by the individual citizens, etc.[13]

Although Weber is not mentioned, but rather Georg Simmel and Hans Freyer, the project seems based on the one hand upon sympathetic understanding (Verstehen), as suggested in the paragraph just quoted, and on the other in a sort of Hegelian account of the emergence of objective spirit out of a people's life process, described as an "immanent transcendence" by which "Life pours through its own limits into the beyond of objectifications but, even beyond its borders, remains life, and the same stream, which brought forth objectified form, takes it up again and washes it away."[14] Kant is quoted favorably as identifying the liberation experienced in moral

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[13] Eric Voegelin, "Political Theory as Human Science," in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 32, ed. William Petropoulos and Gilbert Weiss (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), p. 416.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 418.

or spiritual life in contrast to the organic and instinctive life of mere nature. Freyer's research is described as grounded in Edmund Husserl's idea of "the intentionality of consciousness," and Voegelin makes clear that, while works of art objectify the spirit in material productions, "the forms that are most important to us, the social forms of the spirit, are not reflected in material [symbolization]. Also the forms of community life, common law, and faith in God are not exclusively real in the psychic acts that realize them but are independent of these acts and latently present for realization in them."[15]

I suppose one should not make too much of a fragmentary work that was never finished, but I find it difficult not to think that Voegelin's prewar project comes to fruition in his *New Science of Politics*, written as lectures delivered at the University of Chicago in 1951. Of course by then the larger scheme has altered so that political order appears, not as a transcendent objective order that wells up from subjective life forces, but constituted by "symbols by which political societies interpret themselves as representatives of transcendent truth."[16] In continuity with the German tradition, this inquiry into political order "become[s] a philosophy of history"—and in his later work, *Anamnesis*, Voegelin emphasizes the symbol of process even in theology itself[17]—but it is a history that emerges in response to a divine ground that underlies human experience and seems to summon human experiment. In contrast to the German tradition, or at least the tradition of Hegel, and in keeping with the presence in the theory of divine transcendence, Voegelin

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[15] *Ibid.*, p. 428.

[16] Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 1.

[17] Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, tr. Gerhart Niemeyer (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), pp. 26-27.

does not suppose that the order of history is assured to be progressive. Quite to the contrary, while he explains that Christian symbolization of man's encounter with the divine goes beyond the ancient Asiatic symbol of the divine emperor as well as beyond the symbol of the Greek polis with its common good achieved by active citizens under the patronage of passionate gods, Western modernity is a deformation rather than an improvement, a newer version (indeed many versions) of the ancient heresy of Gnosticism, whereby men presumed themselves adequately endowed with human knowledge and able to dispense with any concern for divine, transcendent mystery. I suppose it would not violate Voegelin's understanding to refer to his "new science of politics" as a form of *Geisteswissenschaft*—it certainly transcends in its ambitions and its range most of what passes for political science in the United States in either the era in which he wrote or that in which we now read—provided one translate "Geist" as spiritual and not simply as "human." But its distinctive characteristic is its openness to the divine and to symbolization of the divine in its analysis of politics, and consequently its unrelenting critique of those all-too-human attempts at a science of politics, from positivism to Marxism to modern behaviorism, that suppress the question of divinity and suppose, like the ancient Gnostics and indeed in historical continuity with them, that man through his own intelligence can become the master of his fate.

Given this framework, it is no surprise that when Voegelin treats humanism, it is in the guise of the sixteenth-century intellectual movement, not as a permanent possibility of human thinking that relies wholly on man's thinking about himself and his creations. Indeed, how Strauss defines humanism seems congruent if not

identical with how Voegelin defines Gnosticism. Voegelin does not say that the humanists were gnostics, but he portrays them as standing on the precipice of Gnosticism. Since his critical case study concerns the author of *Utopia*, Thomas More, it is there I will turn in the balance of my paper.

Voegelin begins his 1951 essay on More provocatively—"Sir Thomas More is distinguished among men for being a saint of the Catholic Church as well as of the Communist movement"—and he ends it savagely: "The actual atrocities of Western colonial imperialism, of National Socialism, and of Communism mark the end of a curve, of which the beginning was marked by the playful atrocity of the humanistic intellectual."[18] In between is more interpretation than indictment, since on the whole Voegelin acknowledges that More meant the image of Utopia playfully if not altogether innocently and understood it to mean "Nowhere," with no thought of forcing its actualization upon the world as subsequent "utopians" were to do with their ideals. The charge that frames the essay is a historical one, of course, arising as much from Voegelin's method of analysis as from More's historically unself-conscious deeds. There is probably insight in Voegelin's claim at the outset that More's book, written on the heels of the discovery of the Americas, is made possible by the prospect of founding new colonies, a possibility he thinks had been largely foreclosed since the age when this was last common and when as a result there was ample reflection on the best city, the age of the classical Greeks. But this also supposes that the transformation of "utopia" from literary experiment to political blueprint was likely if not inevitable in the circumstances, and it supposes the

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[18] Voegelin, "More's *Utopia*," in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 10, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), pp. 197, 217.

author had such a project in mind, however inchoately, when he wrote. And the supposition leads Voegelin, I think, to misunderstand More's intention and to discredit him unfairly.

Utopia is a famously playful book, and one that is notoriously difficult to interpret with confidence. It is a dialogue; the author writes himself in as a character and treats himself ironically; the gag that Utopia actually exists on the other side of the world is carried to absurd lengths, for example by having the chief character contrast Plato's imaginary republic with the supposedly actual Utopian commonwealth; the character who makes this statement is hardly portrayed as wholly reliable or unbiased in any case, placing his whole account under a shadow; the character More raises doubts about the goodness of Utopia, which the author More's narrator has described as the best possible city; there are several decisive moments where Utopian institutions deviate so starkly from Christian doctrine as to raise questions about More's intention, for example regarding suicide, toleration, and divorce, even though it is clear that the Utopians are supposed ignorant of Christianity until the arrival of the narrator-observer's ship. Voegelin for the most part handles these issues adroitly, offering his interpretations tentatively and making room for deliberate ambiguity. The exception, responsible for the closing charge, is his interpretation of More's account of Utopian warfare, which he reads un-ironically and perhaps, despite his disclaimer, under the influence of the German school which found in More the beginnings of self-righteous English imperialism.

Voegelin's charge against humanism is evident in his critique of the first book of *Utopia*, the dialogue on the question of how a philosopher should advise a

prince, that reaches the conclusion that what is needed is a description of the best city. Writes Voegelin, "In More as in Erasmus we can observe the transformation of the spiritual power into the power of the secular intellectual," evident in the dialogue in the dichotomy in book one between scholastic philosophy, which More agrees has no purchase in political circles, and civil or polite philosophy, which More describes as circumspect and willing to compromise, but Voegelin excoriates as "a little opiate to overcome [one's] scruples… the argument of the 'collaborator."[19] Leaving aside whether More the author agrees with the argument of More the character—the author, after all, discovers a third way, the literary presentation of a best regime—Voegelin sees More as defending a "renunciation of the spirit as the ultimate authority beyond the temporal order":

> The Erasmian princely philosophy, as well as More's polite philosophy, is wisdom that draws on classic and Christian traditions; but it has lost the savageness that cannot come from the past but only from the eternal presence of the source…. [T]he idea of the *Christianitas* as the Mystical Body of Christ, articulated into its spiritual and temporal orders with equal public rank, had lost its hold over the sentiments of More at least to the degree that, as least in this phase of his life, the spiritual order was no longer experienced as a representative public order in the commonwealth. The life of the spirit had become a private affair and, since as a mystic More was not strong enough to stand up for himself, the temporal order had become the secular commonwealth, with the monopoly of public representation, retaining of

[19] *Ibid.*, pp. 202-203.

> Christian traditions only as much as historical circumstance had left at the moment.[20]

I presume Voegelin writes, "at least in this phase," so as not to fall into the absurdity of charging with spiritual weakness a man who a couple decades later dies a martyr—though to Voegelin this was tragedy, not triumph, as More reaped the consequences of throwing in his lot with "civil philosophy" and the state.

In his insistence on interpreting More historically, however, Voegelin misses More's deeply thoughtful attempt to address the corruption of his age, not by removing the Church but by restoring political philosophy in a Christian context. His starting the dialogue with his character self coming out of morning mass and his relating a dialogue at the table of a cardinal-chancellor—complete with the appearance of an intolerant monk—hardly indicates More's overlooking the question of institutional Christianity and the state. Had More been called to the Church—as Voegelin notes, he spent time with the Charterhouse Carthusians and the Greenwich Franciscans and considered Holy Orders before opting to study law—perhaps he would have taken Voegelin's advice and sought reform in the Church, but as his was a lay vocation, it makes more sense that he would address the problem from the opposite direction. Voegelin notes that More "has the *Civitas Dei* at his fingertips," alluding no doubt to the fact that More as a young man of twenty-three had delivered well-attended and highly acclaimed lectures on Augustine's book in London;[21] if there was a written text to these lectures, it has been lost, but is

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[20] *Ibid.*, p. 203.

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 212, 208; for the account of More's lectures, see R. W. Chalmers, *Thomas More* (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1936), pp. 82-83.

it not possible to read *Utopia* as a complement to the *City of God*, an attempt now to rethink the city of man as it appears in the light of Christianity, an attempt to describe civic life as it would appear if men were as Augustine or perhaps rather as his fellow humanists wished they would be, without *superbia*? Voegelin repeatedly denies that More's *Utopia* is the same sort of project as Plato's *Republic*,[22] and while that is so if the books are respectively as Voegelin interprets them to be, that hardly settles the question of whether More himself did not intend to imitate Plato—there is certainly internal evidence to that effect, as noted above—and thus whether the differences are self-conscious ones on More's part, expected of a Christian philosopher who must account for the teachings of Christ as well as those of Socrates. To be sure, More's focus is more exclusively on the city than Plato's, for the city in the *Republic* but emphatically not in *Utopia* is presented as a microcosm of the soul. But the city of Plato's *Laws* is not soul-like, even if there is a question of a divine lawgiver, and the advent of the Gospel and the Church changes the question of the best city (and of the soul) to the Christian, as Voegelin well knows. In the hands of Machiavelli and of subsequent "utopians" in his tradition, the quest for an ideal regime entails the eventual suppression of the Church, but why should we suppose that More's attempt was other than to find a way to rethink and thus reform the state alongside her?

STRAUSS AND VOEGELIN ON POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Curiously, while Voegelin is critical of More, Strauss pays him the rare honor of a compliment for his understanding of Plato's *Republic*, speculating that More's

[22] Voegelin, "More's *Utopia*," pp. 199, 201-202, 206, esp. note 14.

playful term "utopia" captures also Plato's understanding of the best regime and that his literary sense was sufficiently fine-tuned that he knew how to convey his differences with Plato through the scheduling of a meal.[23] There is no indication that Strauss thinks More's imitation of Plato signals his rejection of Christianity; that he and his co-editor chose not to include a chapter on More in their *History of Political Philosophy* perhaps suggests that he considered More's attempt to revive political philosophy in the context of the Christian era unsuccessful.[24] Still, to revert to the language of his essay, "Social Science and Humanism," perhaps Strauss would be willing to count More as a "moderate humanist," one whose efforts to understand the human things on their own terms still respected the need for a metaphysical account of first principles—and so perhaps left room for lived principles grounded in faith rather than in metaphysics. More was certainly a practitioner and an advocate of the "civic art," and Strauss's revival of this phrase is likely meant to turn the attention of his readers back to the humanist tradition that remained continuous from the Renaissance to the twentieth century.

Voegelin's disdain for humanism as the precursor to modern Gnosticism reflects his different attitude toward the divine, or maybe one should say his different understanding of how men's attitude toward the divine structures their political order. In Strauss theology is always in tension with philosophy, but this seems not necessarily to determine the character of the political regime, which

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[23] See Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, p. 139, and *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), p. 61.

[24] See, e.g., Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, eds., *History of Political Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), where More would have appeared between Machiavelli and Luther.

Strauss is willing to analyze in Aristotelian terms, even while acknowledging that there is truth in Machiavelli's observation that Christianity introduced something new into the political world. Both Strauss and Voegelin recognize the inadequacy of mere humanism, that is, of an attempt to account for the human things only in human terms, without attention to the divine. Whether Strauss's or Voegelin's account of political order leaves more room for the orthodox Christian believer seems to me an open question, albeit not identical to the question of which provides a more adequate political science.